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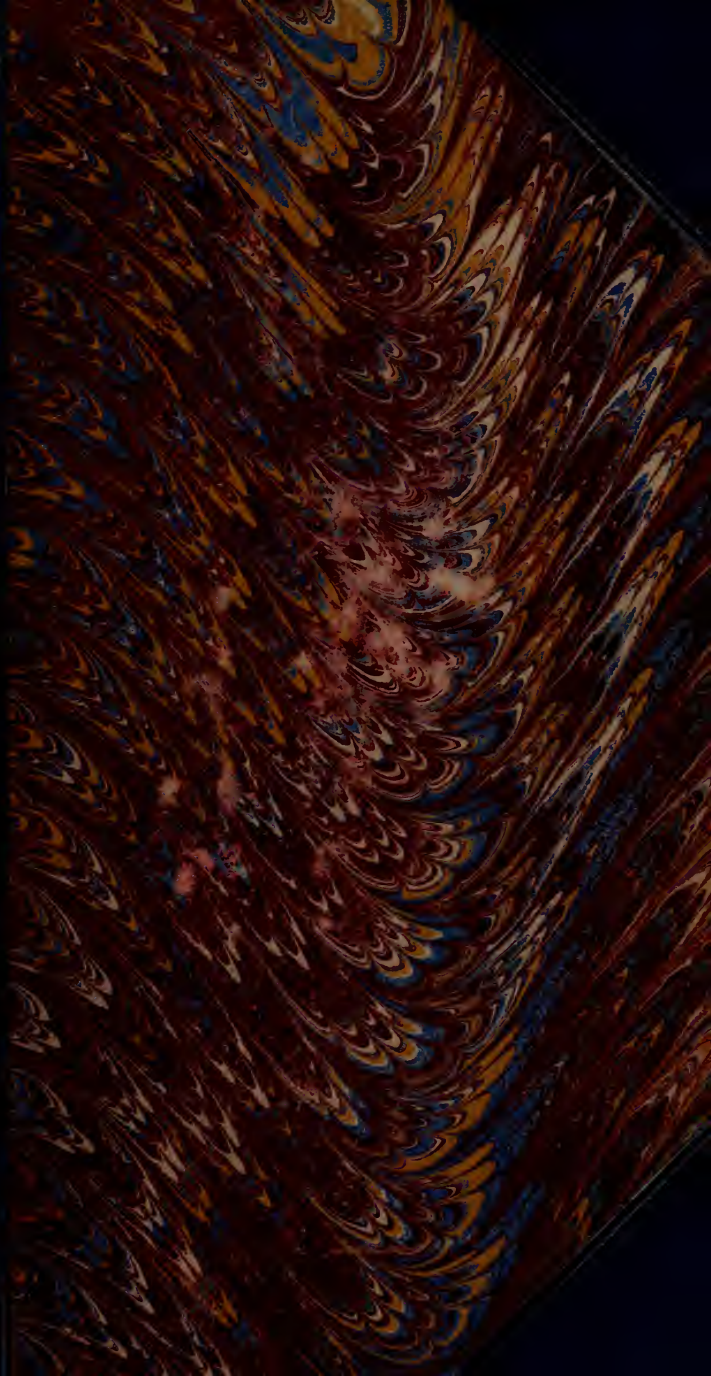

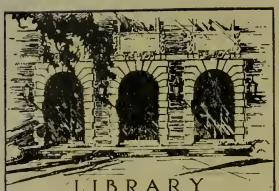
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WHAT'S MINE'S MINE

BY

GEORGE MAC DONALD

AUTHOR OF "ROBERT FALCONER," "DONAL GRANT," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH & CO., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE

1886

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WHAT'S MINE'S MINE.

CHAPTER I.

THE STORY TOLD BY IAN.

"THERE was once a woman whose husband was well to do, but he died and left her, and then she sank into poverty. She did her best; but she had a large family, and work was hard to find, and hard to do when it was found, and hardly paid when it was done. Only hearts of grace can understand the struggles of the poor—with everything but God against them! But she trusted in God, and said whatever he pleased must be right, whether he sent it with his own hand or not.

"Now, whether it was that she could not find them enough to eat, or that she could not keep them warm enough, I do not know; I do not think it was that they had not gladness enough, which is as necessary for young things as food and air and sun, for it is wonderful on how little a child can be happy; but whatever was the cause, they began to die. One after the other sickened and lay down, and did not rise again; and for a time her life was just a waiting upon death. She would have wanted to die herself, but that there was always another to die first; she had to see them all safe home before she dared wish to go herself. But at length the last of them was gone, and then when she had no more to provide for, the heart of work went out of her: where was the good of working for herself! there was no interest in it! But she knew it was the will of God she should work and eat until he chose to take her back to himself; so she worked on for her living while she would much rather have worked

for her dying; and comforted herself that every day brought death a day nearer. Then she fell ill herself, and could work no more, and thought God was going to let her die; for, able to win her bread no longer, surely she was free to lie down and wait for death! But just as she was going to her bed for the last time, she bethought herself that she was bound to give her neighbour the chance of doing a good deed; and felt that any creature dying at her door without letting her know he was in want, would do her a great wrong. She saw it was the will of God that she should beg, so put on her clothes again, and went out to beg. It was sore work, and she said so to the priest. But the priest told her she need not mind, for our Lord himself lived by the kindness of the women who went about with him. They knew he could not make a living for his own body and a living for the souls of so many as well, and the least they could do was to keep him alive who was making them alive. She said that was very true; but he

was all the time doing everything for everybody, and she was doing nothing for anybody. The priest was a wise man, and did not tell her how she had, since ever he knew her, been doing the work of God in his heart, helping him to believe and trust in God; so that in fact, when he was preaching, she was preaching. He did not tell her that, I say, for he was jealous over her beauty, and would have Christ's beloved sheep enter his holy kingdom with her wool white, however torn it might be. So he left her to think she was nobody at all; and told her that, whether she was worth keeping alive or not, whether she was worth begging for or not, whether it was a disgrace or an honour to beg, all was one, for it was the will of God that she should beg, and there was no word more to be said, and no thought more to be thought about it. To this she heartily agreed, and did beg—enough to keep her alive, and no more.

"But at last she saw she must leave that part of the country, and go back to the

place her husband took her from. For the people about her were very poor, and she thought it hard on them to have to help a stranger like her; also her own people would want her to bury. For you must know that in the clans, marriage was thought to be dissolved by death, so far at least as the body was concerned; therefore the body of a dead wife was generally carried back to the burial place of her own people, there to be gathered to her fathers. So the woman set out for her own country, begging her way thither. Nor had she any difficulty, for there were not a few poor people on her way, and the poor are the readiest to help the poor, also to know whether a person is one that ought to be helped or not.

"One night she came to a farm house where a rich miserly farmer dwelt. She knew about him, and had not meant to stop there, but she was weary, and the sun went down as she reached his gate, and she felt as if she could go no farther. So she went up to the door and knocked, and asked if

she could have a night's lodging. The woman who opened to her went and asked the farmer. Now the old man did not like hospitality, and in particular to such as stood most in need of it; he did not enjoy throwing away money! At the same time, however, he was very fond of hearing all the country rumours; and he thought with himself he would buy her news with a scrap of what was going, and a shake-down at the foot of the wall. So he told his servant to bring her in.

"He received her not unkindly, for he wanted her to talk; and he let her have a share of the supper, such as it was. But not until he had asked every question about everybody he could think of, and drawn her own history from her as well, would he allow her to have the rest she so much needed.

"Now it was a poor house, like most in the country, and nearly without partitions The old man had his warm box-bed, and slept on feathers where no draught could

reach him, and the poor woman had her bed of short rumpled straw on the earthen floor at the foot of the wall in the coldest corner. Yet the heart of the man had been moved by her story, for, without dwelling on her sufferings, she had been honest in telling it. He had indeed, ere he went to sleep, thanked God that he was so much better off than she. For if he did not think it the duty of the rich man to share with his neighbours, he at least thought it his duty to thank God for his being richer than they.

"Now it may well seem strange that such a man should be privileged to see a vision; but we do read in the Bible of a prophet who did not even know his duty to an ass, so that the ass had to teach it him. And the man alone saw the vision; the woman saw nothing of it. But she did not require to see any vision, for she had truth in the inward parts, which is better than all visions. The vision was on this wise:—In the middle of the night the man came wide

awake, and looking out of his bed, saw the door open, and a light come in, burning like a star, of a faint rosy colour, unlike any light he had ever before seen. Another and another came in, and more yet, until he counted six of them. They moved near the floor, but he could not see clearly what sort of little creatures they were that were carrying them. They went up to the woman's bed, and walked slowly round it in a hovering kind of a way, stopping, and moving up and down, and going on again; and when they had done this three times, they went slowly out of the door again, stopping for a moment several times as they went.

"He fell asleep, and waking not very early, was surprised to see his guest still on her hard couch—as quiet as any rich woman, he said to himself, on her feather bed. He woke her, told her he wondered she should sleep so far into the morning, and narrated the curious vision he had had. 'Does not that explain to you,' she said, 'how it is

that I have slept so long? Those were my dead children you saw come to me. They died young, without any sin, and God lets them come and comfort their poor sinful mother. I often see them in my dreams. If, when I am gone, you will look at my bed, you will find every straw laid straight and smooth. That is what they were doing last night.' Then she gave him thanks for good fare and good rest, and took her way to her own, leaving the farmer better pleased with himself than he had been for a long time, partly because there had been granted him a vision from heaven.

"At last the woman died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. She was now with her own people indeed, that is, with God and all the good. The old farmer did not know of her death till a long time after; but it was upon the night she died, as near as he could then make out, that he dreamed a wonderful dream. He never told it to any but the priest from whom he sought comfort when he lay dying; and

the priest did not tell it till after everybody belonging to the old man was gone. This was the dream :—

"He was lying awake in his own bed, as he thought, in the dark night, when the poor woman came in at the door, having in her hand a wax candle, but not alight. He said to her, 'You extravagant woman! where did you get that candle?' She answered, 'It was put into my hand when I died, with the word that I was to wander till I found a fire at which to light it.' 'There!' said he, 'there's the rested fire! Blow and get a light, poor thing! It shall never be said I refused a body a light!' She went to the hearth, and began to blow at the smouldering peat; but, for all she kept trying, she could not light her candle. The old man thought it was because she was dead, not because he was dead in sin, and losing his patience, cried, 'You foolish woman! haven't you wit enough left to light a candle? It's small wonder you came to beggary!' Still she went on trying, but

the more she tried, the blacker grew the peat she was blowing at. It would indeed blaze up at her breath, but the moment she brought the candle near it to catch the flame, it grew black, and each time blacker than before. 'Tut! give me the candle,' cried the farmer, springing out of bed; 'I will light it for you!' But as he stretched out his hand to take it, the woman disappeared, and he saw that the fire was dead out. 'Here's a fine business!' he said. 'How am I to get a light?' For he was miles from the next house. And with that he turned to go back to his bed. When he came near it, he saw somebody lying in it. 'What! has the carline got into my very bed?' he cried, and went to drive her out of the bed and out of the house. But when he came close, he saw it was himself lying there, and knew that at least he was out of the body, if not downright dead. The next moment he found himself on the moor, following the woman, some distance before him, with her unlighted candle still

in her hand. He walked as fast as he could to get up with her, but could not; he called after her, but she did not seem to hear.

"When first he set out, he knew every step of the ground, but by and by he ceased to know it. The moor stretched out endlessly, and the woman walked on and on. Without a thought of turning back, he followed. At length he saw a gate, seemingly in the side of a hill. The woman knocked, and by the time it opened, he was near enough to hear what passed. It was a grave and stately, but very happy-looking man that opened it, and he knew at once it was St. Peter. When he saw the woman, he stooped and kissed her. The same moment a light shone from her, and the old man thought her candle was lighted at last; but presently he saw it was her head that gave out the shining. And he heard her say, 'I pray you, St. Peter, remember the rich tenant of Balmacoy; he gave me shelter one whole night, and would have let me light my candle but I could not.'

St. Peter answered, 'His fire was not fire enough to light your candle, and the bed he gave you was of short straw!' 'True, St. Peter,' said the woman, 'but he gave me some supper, and it is hard for a rich man to be generous! You may say the supper was not very good, but at least it was more than a cup of cold water!' 'Yes, verily!' answered the saint, 'but he did not give it you because you loved God, or because you were in need of it, but because he wanted to hear your news.' Then the woman was sad, for she could not think of anything more to say for the poor old rich man. And St. Peter saw that she was sad, and said, 'But if he die to-night, he shall have a place inside the gate, because you pray for him. He shall lie there!' And he pointed to just such a bed of short crumpled straw as she had lain upon in his house. But she said, 'St. Peter, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Is that the kind of welcome to give a poor new-dead man? Where then would he have lain if I had not prayed for

him?' 'In the dog-kennel outside there,' answered St. Peter. 'Oh, then, please, let me go back and warn him what comes of loving money!' she pleaded. 'That is not necessary,' he replied; 'the man is hearing every word you and I are this moment saying to each other.' 'I am so glad!' rejoined the woman; 'it will make him repent.' 'He will not be a straw the better for it!' answered the saint. 'He thinks now that he will do differently, and perhaps when he wakes will think so still; but in a day or two he will mock at it as a foolish dream. To gather money will seem to him common sense, and to lay up treasure in heaven nonsense. A bird in the hand will be to him worth ten in the heavenly bush. And the end will be that he will not get the straw inside the gate, and there will be many worse places than the dog-kennel too good for him!' With that he woke.

"'What an odd dream!' he said to himself. 'I had better mind what I am about!' So he was better that day, eating

and drinking more freely, and giving more to his people. But the rest of the week he was worse than ever, trying to save what he had that day spent, and so he went on growing worse. When he found himself dying, the terror of his dream came upon him, and he told all to the priest. But the priest could not comfort him."

By the time the story was over, to which Mercy had listened without a word, they were alone in the great starry night, on the side of a hill, with the snow high above them, and the heavens above the snow, and the stars above the heavens, and God above and below everything. Only Ian felt his presence. Mercy had not missed him yet.

She did not see much in the tale: how could she? It was very odd, she thought, but not very interesting. She had expected a tale of clan-feud, or a love-story! Yet the seriousness of her companion in its narration had made some impression upon her.

"They told me you were an officer," she said, "but I see you are a clergyman! Do you tell stories like that from the pulpit?"

"I am a soldier," answered Ian, "not a clergyman. But I have heard my father tell such a story from the pulpit."

Ian imagined himself foiled in his attempt to interest the maiden. If he was, it would not be surprising. He had not the least desire to commend *himself* to the girl; and he would not talk rubbish even to a child. There is sensible and senseless nonsense, good absurdity and bad.

As Mercy recounted to her sister the story Ian had told her, it certainly was silly enough. She had retained but the withered stalk and leaves; the strange flower was gone. Christina judged it hardly a story for a gentleman to tell a lady.

They returned almost in silence to find the table laid, a plentiful supper spread, and the company seated. After supper came singing of songs, saying of ballads, and telling of tales. I know with what in-

credulity many highlanders will read of a merry-making in their own country at which no horn went round, no punch-bowl was filled and emptied without stint! But the clearer the brain, the better justice is done to the more etherial wine of the soul. Of several of the old songs Christina begged the tunes, but was disappointed to find that, as she could not take them down, so the singers of them could not set them down. In the tales she found no interest. The hostess sang to her harp, and made to revering listeners eloquent music, for her high clear tones had not yet lost their sweetness, and she had some art to come in aid of her much feeling: loud murmurs of delight, in the soft strange tongue of the songs themselves, followed the profound silence with which they were heard, but Christina wondered what there was to applaud. She could not herself sing without accompaniment, and when she left, it was with a regretful feeling that she had not distinguished herself. Naturally, as

they went home, the guests from the New House had much fun over the queer fashions and poverty-stricken company, the harp and the bagpipes, the horrible haggis, the wild minor songs, and the unintelligible stories and jokes; but the ladies agreed that the Macruadh was a splendid fellow.

CHAPTER II.

ROB OF THE ANGELS.

Among the peasantry assembled at the feast, were two that had neither danced, nor seated themselves at the long table where all were welcome. Mercy wondered what might be the reason of their separation. Her first thought was that they must be somehow, she could not well imagine how, in lower position than any of the rest —had perhaps offended against the law, perhaps been in prison, and so the rest would not keep company with them; or perhaps they were beggars who did not belong to the clan, and therefore, although fed, were not allowed to eat with it! But she soon saw she must be wrong in each

conjecture; for if there was any avoiding, it was on the part of the two: every one, it was clear, was almost on the alert to wait upon them. They seemed indeed rather persons of distinction than outcasts; for it was with something like homage, except for a certain coaxing tone in the speech of the ministrants, that they were attended. They had to help themselves to nothing; everything was carried to them. Now one, now another, where all were guests and all were servants, would rise from the table to offer them something, or see what they would choose or might be in want of, while they partook with the same dignity and self-restraint that was to be noted in all.

The elder was a man about five-and-fifty, tall and lean, with a wiry frame, dark grizzled hair, and a shaven face. His dress, which was in the style of the country, was very poor, but decent; only his plaid was large and thick, and bright compared with the rest of his apparel: it was a present he had had from his clan—some giving the

wool, and others the labour in carding, dyeing, and weaving it. He carried himself like a soldier—which he had never been, though his father had. His eyes were remarkably clear and keen, and the way he used them could hardly fail to attract attention. Every now and then they would suddenly fix themselves with a gaze of earnest inquiry, which would either grow to perception, or presently melt away and let his glance go gently roving, ready to receive, but looking for nothing. His face was very brown and healthy, with marked and handsome features. Its expression seemed at first a little severe, but soon, to reading eyes, disclosed patience and tenderness. At the same time there was in it a something indescribably unlike the other faces present—and indeed his whole person and carriage were similarly peculiar. Had Mercy, however, spent on him a little more attention, the peculiarity would have explained itself. She would have seen that, although everybody spoke

to him, he never spoke in reply—only made signs, sometimes with his lips, oftener with hand or head: the man was deaf and dumb. But such was the keenness of his observation that he understood everything said to him by one he knew, and much from the lips of a stranger.

His companion was a youth whose age it would have been difficult to guess. He looked a lad, and was not far from thirty. His clothing was much like his father's—poor enough, yet with the air of being a better suit than that worn every day. He was very pale and curiously freckled, with great gray eyes like his father's, which had however an altogether different expression. They looked dreamy, and seemed almost careless of what passed before them, though now and then a certain quick, sharp turn of the head showed him not devoid of attention.

The relation between the two was strangely interesting. Day and night they were inseparable. Because the father was

deaf, the son gave all his attention to the sounds of the world; his soul sat in his ears, ever awake, ever listening; while such was his confidence in his father's sight, that he scarcely troubled himself to look where he set his feet. His expression also was peculiar, partly from this cause, mainly from a deeper. It was a far-away look, which a common glance would have taken to indicate that he was "not all there." In a lowland parish he would have been regarded as little better than a gifted idiot; in the mountains he was looked upon as a seer, one in communion with higher powers. Whether his people were of this opinion from being all fools together, and therefore unable to know a fool, or the lowland authorities would have been right in taking charge of him, let him who pleases judge or misjudge for himself. What his own thought of him came out in the name they gave him: "Rob of the Angels," they called him. He was nearly a foot shorter than his father, and very thin. Some said

he looked always cold; but I think that came of the wonderful peace on his face, like the quiet of a lake over which lies a thin mist. Never was stronger or fuller devotion manifested by son to father than by Rob of the Angels to Hector of the Stags. His filial love and faith were perfect. While they were together, he was in his own calm elysium; when they were apart, which was seldom for more than a few minutes, his spirit seemed always waiting. I believe his notions of God his father, and Hector his father, were strangely mingled—the more perhaps that the two fathers were equally silent. It would have been a valuable revelation to some theologians to see in those two what *love* might mean.

So gentle was Rob of the Angels, that all the women, down to the youngest maid-child, gave him a compassionate, mother-like love. He had lost his mother when he was an infant; the father had brought him up with his own hand, and from the moment

of his mother's departure had scarce let him out of his sight; but the whole woman-remnant of the clan was as a mother to the boy. And from the first they had so talked to him of his mother, greatly no doubt through the feeling that from his father he could learn nothing of her, that now his mother seemed to him everywhere: he could not see God; why should not his mother be there though he could not see her! No wonder the man was peaceful!

Many would be inclined to call the two but poachers and vagabonds—vagabonds because they lived in houses not quite made with hands, for they had several dwellings that were mostly caves—which yet they contrived to make warm and comfortable; and poachers because they lived by the creatures which God scatters on his hills for his humans. Let those who inherit or purchase, avenge the breach of law; but let them not wonder when those who are disinherited and sold, cry out against the breach of higher law!

The land here had never, partly from the troubles besetting its owners, but more from their regard for the poor of the clan, been with any care preserved; little notice was ever taken of what game was killed, or who killed it. At the same time any wish of the chief with regard to the deer, of which Rob's father for one knew every antlered head, was rigidly respected. As to the parts which became the property of others—the boundaries between were not very definite, and sale could ill change habits, especially where owners were but beginning to bestir themselves about the deer, or any of the wild animals called game. Hector and Rob led their life with untroubled conscience and easy mind.

In a world of the devil, where the justification of existence lay in money on the one side, and work for money on the other, there could be no justification of the existence of these men; but this world does not belong to the devil, though it may often seem as if it did, and father and son lived

and enjoyed life, as in a manner so to a degree unintelligible to him who, without his money and its consolations, would know himself in the hell he has not yet recognized. Neither of them could read or write; neither of them had a penny laid by for wet weather; neither of them would leave any memory beyond their generation; the will of neither would be laid up in Doctors' Commons; neither of the two would leave on record a single fact concerning one of the animals whose ways and habits they knew better than any other man in the highlands; that they were nothing, and worth nothing to anybody—even to themselves, would have been the judgment of most strangers concerning them; but God knew what a life of unspeakable pleasures it was that he had given them—a life the change from which to the life beyond, would scarce be distracting: neither would find himself much out of doors when he died. To Rob of the Angels how could Abraham's bosom feel strange,

accustomed to lie night after night, star-melted and soft-breathing, or snow-ghastly and howling, with his head on the bosom of Hector of the Stags—an Abraham who could as ill do without his Isaac, as his Isaac without him!

The father trusted his son's hearing as implicitly as his own sight. When he saw a certain look come on his face, he would drop on the instant, and crouch as still as if he had ears and knew what noise was, watching Rob's face for news of some sound wandering through the vast of the night.

It seemed at times, however, as if either he was not quite deaf, or he had some gift that went toward compensation. To all motion about him he was sensitive as no other man. I am afraid to say from how far off the solid earth would convey to him the vibration of a stag's footstep. Rob sometimes thought his cheek must feel the wind of a sound to which his ear was irresponsive. Beyond a doubt he was occasionally aware of the proximity of an animal,

and knew what animal it was, of which Rob had no intimation. His being, corporeal and spiritual, seemed, to the ceaseless vibrations of the great globe, a very seismograph. Often would he make his sign to Rob to lay his ear on the ground and listen, when no indication had reached the latter. I suspect the exceptional development in him of some sense rudimentary in us all.

He had the keenest eyes in Glenruadh, and was a dead shot. Even the chief was not his equal. Yet he never stalked a deer, never killed anything, for mere sport. I am not certain he never had, but for Rob of the Angels, he had the deep-rooted feeling of his chief in regard to the animals. What they wanted for food, they would kill; but it was not much they needed, for seldom can two men have lived on less, and they had positively not a greed of any kind between them. If their necessity was meal or potatoes, they would carry grouse or hares down the glen, or arrange with some farmer's wife, perhaps Mrs. Macruadh her-

self, for the haunches of a doe; but they never killed from pleasure in killing. Of creatures destructive to game they killed enough to do far more than make up for all the game they took; and for the skins of ermine and stoat and fox and otter they could always get money's worth; money itself they never sought or had. If the little birds be regarded as earning the fruit and seed they devour by the grubs and slugs they destroy, then Hector of the Stags and Rob of the Angels also thoroughly earned their food.

When a trustworthy messenger was wanted, and Rob was within reach, he was sure to be employed. But not even then were his father and he quite parted. Hector would shoulder his gun, and follow in the track of his fleet-footed son till he met him returning.

For what was life to Hector but to be with Rob! Was his Mary's son to go about the world unattended! He had a yet stronger feeling than any of the clan

that his son was not of the common race of mortals. To Hector also, after their own fashion, would Rob of the Angels tell the tales that suggested the name his clanspeople gave him—wonderful tales of the high mountain-nights, the actors in them for the most part angels. Whether Rob believed he had intercourse with such beings, heard them speak, and saw them do the things he reported, I cannot tell: it may be that, like any other poet of good things, he but saw and believed the things his tales meant, the things with which he represented the angels as dealing, and concerning which he told their sayings. To the eyes of those who knew him, Rob seemed just the sort of person with whom the angels might be well pleased to hold converse: was he not simplicity itself, truth, generosity, helpfulness? Did he not, when a child, all but lose his life in the rescue of an idiot from the swollen burn? Did he not, when a boy, fight a great golden eagle on its nest,

thinking to deliver the lamb it had carried away? Knowing his father in want of a new bonnet, did not Rob with his bare hands seize an otter at the mouth of its hole, and carry it home, laughing merrily over the wounds it had given him?

His voice had in it a strangely peculiar tone, making it seem not of this world. Especially after he had been talking for some time, it would appear to come from far away, not from the lips of the man looking you in the face.

It was wonderful with what solemnity of speech, and purity of form he would tell his tales. So much in solitude with his dumb father, his speech might well be unlike the speech of other men; but whence the impression of cultivation it produced?

When the Christmas party broke up, most of the guests took the road toward the village, the chief and his brother accompanying them part of the way. Of these were Rob and his father, walking hand in hand, Hector looking straight

before him, Rob gazing up into the heavens, as if holding counsel with the stars.

"Are you seeing any angels, Rob?" asked a gentle girl of ten.

"Well, and I'm not sure," answered Rob of the Angels.

"Sure you can tell whether you see anything!"

"Oh, yes, I see! but it is not easy to tell what will be an angel and what will not. There's so much all blue up there, it might be full of angels and none of us see one of them!"

"Do tell us what you see, Rob, dear Rob," said the girl.

"Well, and I will tell you. I think I see many heads close together, talking."

"And can you hear what they will be saying?"

"Some of it."

"Tell me, do tell me—some—just a little."

"Well then, they are saying, one to the

other—not very plain, but I can hear—they are saying, 'I wonder when people will be good! It would be so easy, if only they would mean it, and begin when they are little!' That's what they are saying as they look down on us walking along."

"That will be good advice, Rob!" said one of the women.

"And," he resumed, "they are saying now—at least that is what it sounds to me —'I wish women were as good as they were when they were little girls!'"

"Now I know they are not saying that!" remarked the woman. "How should the angels trouble themselves about us! Rob, dear, confess you are making it up, because the child would be asking you."

Rob made no answer, but some saw him smile a curious smile. Rob would never defend anything he had said, or dispute anything another said. After a moment or two, he spoke again.

"Shall I be telling you what I heard

them saying to each other this last night of all?" he asked.

"Yes, do, do!"

"It was upon Dorrachbeg; and there were two of them. They were sitting together in the moon—in the correi on the side of the hill over the village. I was lying in a bush near them, for I could not sleep, and came out, and the night was not cold. Now I would never be so bad-mannered as to listen where persons did not want me to hear."

"What were they like, Rob, dear?" interrupted the girl.

"That does not matter much," answered Rob; "but they were white, and their eyes not so white, but brighter; for so many sad things go in at their eyes when they come down to the earth, that it makes them dark."

"How could they be brighter and darker both at once?" asked the girl, very pertinently.

"I will tell you," answered Rob. "The

dark things that go in at their eyes, they have to burn them in the fire of faith; and it is the fire of that burning that makes their eyes bright; it is the fire of their faith burning up the sad things they see."

"Oh, yes! I understand now!" said the girl. "And what were their clothes like, Rob?"

"When you see the angels, you don't think much about their clothes."

"And what were they saying?"

"I spoke first—the moment I saw them, for I was not sure they knew that I was there. I said, 'I am here, gentlemen.' 'Yes, we know that,' they answered. 'Are you far from home, gentlemen?' I asked. 'It is all one for that,' they answered. 'Well,' said I, 'it is true, gentlemen, for you seem as much at home here on the side of Dorrachbeg, as if it was a hill in paradise!' 'And how do you know it is not?' said they. 'Because I see people do upon it as they would not in paradise,' I answered. 'Ah!' said one of them, 'the

hill may be in paradise, and the people not! But you cannot understand these things.' 'I think I do,' I said; 'but surely, if you did let them know they were on a hill in paradise, they would not do as they do!' 'It would be no use telling them,' said he; 'but, oh, how they spoil the house!' 'Are the red deer, and the hares, and the birds in paradise?' I asked. 'Certain sure!' he answered. 'Do they know it?' said I. 'No, it is not necessary for them; but they will know it one day.' 'You do not mind your little brother asking you questions?' I said. 'Ask a hundred, if you will, little brother,' he replied. 'Then tell me why you are down here to-night.' My friend and I came out for a walk, and we thought we would look to see when the village down there will have to be reaped.' 'What do you mean?' I said. 'You cannot see what we see,' they answered; 'but a human place is like a flower, or a field of corn, and grows ripe, or won't grow ripe, and then some of us up there have to sharpen

our sickles.' 'What!' said I, for a great fear came upon me, 'they are not wicked people down there!' 'No, not very wicked, but slow and dull.' Then I could say nothing more for a while, and they did not speak either, but sat looking before them. 'Can you go and come as you please?' I asked at length. 'Yes, just as we are sent,' they answered. 'Would you not like better to go and come of yourselves, as my father and I do?' I said. 'No,' answered both of them, and something in their one voice almost frightened me; 'it is better than everything to go where we are sent. If we had to go and come at our own will, we should be miserable, for we do not love our own will.' 'Not love your own will?' 'No, not at all!' 'Why?' 'Because there is one—oh, ever so much better! When you and your father are quite good, you will not be left to go and come at your own will any more than we are.' And I cried out, and said, 'Oh, dear angel! you frighten me!'

And he said, 'That is because you are only a man, and not a——' Now I am not sure of the word he said next; but I think it was *Christian;* and I do not quite know what the word meant."

"Oh, Rob, dear! everybody knows that!" exclaimed the girl.

But Rob said no more.

While he was talking, Alister had come up behind him, with Annie of the shop, and he said—

"Rob, my friend, I know what you mean, and I want to hear the rest of it: what did the angels say next?"

"They said," answered Rob, "—'Was it your will set you on this beautiful hill, with all these things to love, with such air to breathe, such a father as you've got, and such grand deer about you?' 'No,' I answered. 'Then,' said the angel, 'there must be a better will than yours, for you would never have even thought of such things!' 'How could I, when I wasn't made?' said I. 'There it is!' he returned,

and said no more. I looked up, and the moon was shining, and there were no angels on the stone. But a little way off was my father, come out to see what had become of me."

"Now did you really see and hear all that, Rob?" said Alister.

Rob smiled a beautiful smile—with something in it common people would call idiotic—stopped and turned, took the chief's hand, and carried it to his lips; but not a word more would he speak, and soon they came where the path of the two turned away over the hill.

"Will you not come and sleep at our house?" said one of the company.

But they made kindly excuse.

"The hill-side would miss us; we are expected home!" said Rob—and away they climbed to their hut, a hollow in a limestone rock, with a front wall of turf, there to sleep side by side till the morning came, or, as Rob would have said, "till the wind of the sun woke them."

Rob of the Angels made songs, and would sing one sometimes; but they were in Gaelic, and the more poetic a thing, the more inadequate at least, if not stupid is its translation.

He had all the old legends of the country in his head, and many stories of ghosts and of the second sight. These stories he would tell exactly as he had heard them, showing he believed every word of them; but with such of the legends as were plainly no other than poetic inventions, he would take what liberties he pleased—and they lost nothing by it; for he not only gave them touches of fresh interest, but sent glimmering through them hints of something higher, of which ordinary natures perceived nothing, while others were dimly aware of a loftier intent: according to his listeners was their hearing. In Rob's stories, as in all the finer work of genius, a man would find as much as, and no more than, he was capable of. Ian's opinion of Rob was even higher than Alister's.

"What do you think, Ian, of the stories Rob of the Angels tells?" asked Alister, as they walked home.

"That the Lord has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty," answered Ian.

"Tut! Rob confounds nobody."

"He confounds me," returned Ian.

"Does he believe what he tells?"

"He believes all of it that is to be believed," replied Ian.

"You are as bad as he!" rejoined Alister. "There is no telling, sometimes, what you mean!"

"Tell me this, Alister: can a thing be believed that is not true?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"I say, *no*. Can you eat that which is not bread?"

"I have seen a poor fellow gnawing a stick for hunger!" answered Alister.

"Yes, gnawing! but gnawing is not eating. Did the poor fellow eat the stick? That is just it! Many a man will gnaw at

a lie all his life, and perish of want. I mean *lie*, of course, the real lie—a thing which is in its nature false. He may gnaw at it, he may even swallow it, but I deny that he can believe it. There is not that in it which can be believed; at most it can but be supposed to be true. Belief is another thing. Truth is alone the correlate of belief, just as air is for the lungs, just as form and colour are for the sight. A lie can no more be believed than carbonic acid can be breathed. It goes into the lungs, true, and a lie goes into the mind, but both kill; the one is not *breathed*, the other is not *believed*. The thing that is not true cannot find its way to the home of faith; if it could, it would be at once rejected with a loathing beyond utterance; to a pure soul, which alone can believe, nothing is so loathsome as a pretence of truth. A lie is a pretended truth. If there were no truth there could be no lie. As the devil upon God, the very being of a lie depends on that whose opposite and enemy it is. But tell

me, Alister, do you believe the parables of our Lord?"

"With all my heart."

"Was there any real person in our Lord's mind when he told that one about the unjust judge?"

"I do not suppose there was; but there were doubtless many such."

"Many who would listen to a poor woman because she plagued them?"

"Well, it does not matter; what the story teaches is true, and that was what he wanted believed."

"Just so. The truth in the parables is what they mean, not what they say; and so it is, I think, with Rob of the Angels' stories. He believes all that can be believed of them. At the same time, to a mind so simple, the spirit of God must have freer entrance than to ours—perhaps even teaches the man by what we call *the man's own words.* His words may go before his ideas —his higher ideas at least—his ideas follow after his words. As the half-thoughts pass

through his mind—who can say how much generated by himself, how much directly suggested by the eternal thought in which his spirit lives and breathes!—he drinks and is refreshed. I am convinced that nowhere so much as in the highest knowledge of all—what the people above count knowledge—will the fulfilment of the saying of our Lord, "Many first shall be last, and the last first," cause astonishment; that a man who has been leader of the age's opinion, may be immeasurably behind another whom he would have shut up in a mad-house. Depend upon it, things go on in the soul of that Rob of the Angels which the angels, whether they come to talk with him or not, would gladly look into. Of such as he the angels may one day be the pupils."

A silence followed.

"Do you think the young ladies of the New House could understand Rob of the Angels, Ian?" at length asked Alister.

"Not a bit. I tried the younger, and

she is the best.—They could if they would wake up."

"You might say that of anybody!"

"Yes; but there is this among other differences—that some people do not wake up, because they want a new brain first, such as they will get when they die, perhaps; while others do not wake up, because their whole education has been a rocking of them to sleep. And there is this difference between the girls, that the one is full of herself, and the other is not. The one has a close, the other an open mind."

"And yet," said Alister, "if they heard you say so, the open mind would imagine itself the close, and the close never doubt it was the open!"

CHAPTER III.

AT THE NEW HOUSE.

The ladies of the New House were not a little surprised the next day when, as they sat waiting their guests, the door of the drawing-room opened, and they saw the young highlanders enter in ordinary evening dress. The plough-driving laird himself looked to Christina very much like her patterns of Grosvenor-square. It was long since he had worn his dress-coat, and it was certainly a little small for his more fully developed frame, but he carried himself as straight as a rush, and was nowise embarrassed with hands or feet. His hands were brown and large, but they were well shaped, and not ashamed of themselves,

being as clean as his heart. Out of his hazel eyes, looking in the candle-light nearly as dark as Mercy's, went an occasional glance which an emergency might at once develop into a look of command.

For Ian, he would have attracted attention anywhere, if only from his look of quiet *unselfness*, and the invariable grace of the movement that broke his marked repose; but his entertainers would doubtless have honoured him more had they understood that his manner was just the same and himself as much at home in the grandest court of Europe.

The elder ladies got on together pretty well. The widow of the chief tried to explain to her hostess the condition of the country and its people; the latter, though knowing little and caring less about relations beyond those of the family and social circle, nor feeling any purely human responsibility, was yet interested enough to be able to seem more interested than she was; while her sweet smile and sweet manners

were very pleasing to one who seldom now had the opportunity of meeting a woman so much on her own level.

The gentlemen, too, were tolerably comfortable together. Both Alister and Ian had plenty of talk and anecdote. The latter pleased the ladies with descriptions of northern ways and dresses and manners—perhaps yet more with what pleased the men also, tales of wolf- and bear-shooting. But it seemed odd that, when the talk turned upon the home-shooting called sport, both Alister and Ian should sit in unsmiling silence.

There was in Ian a certain playfulness, a subdued merriment, which made Mercy doubt her ears after his seriousness of the night before. Life seemed to flash from him on all sides, occasionally in a keen stroke of wit, oftener in a humorous presentation of things. His brother alone could see how he would check the witticism on his very lips lest it should hurt. It was in virtue of his tenderness toward every-

thing that had life that he was able to give such narratives of what he had seen, such descriptions of persons he had met. When he told a story, it was with such quiet participation, manifest in the gleam of his gray eyes, in the smile that hovered like the very soul of Psyche about his lips, that his hearers enjoyed the telling more than the tale. Even the chief listened with eagerness to every word that fell from his brother.

The ladies took note that, while the manners of the laird and his mother were in a measure old-fashioned, those of Ian were of the latest: with social custom, in its flow of change, he seemed at home. But his ease never for a moment degenerated into the free-and-easy, the dry rot of manners; there was a stateliness in him that dominated the ease, and a courtesy that would not permit frendliness to fall into premature familiarity. He was at ease with his fellows because he respected them, and courteous because he loved them.

The ladies withdrew, and with their departure came the time that tests the man whether he be in truth a gentleman. In the presence of women the polish that is not revelation but concealment preserves itself only to vanish with them. How would not some women stand aghast to hear but a specimen of the talk of their heroes at such a time!

It had been remarked throughout the dinner that the highlanders took no wine; but it was supposed they were reserving their powers. When they now passed decanter and bottle and jug without filling their glasses, it gave offence to the very soul of Mr. Peregrine Palmer. The bettered custom of the present day had not then made progress enough to affect his table; he was not only fond of a glass of good wine, but had the ambition of the cellar largely developed; he would fain be held a connaisseur in wines, and kept up a good stock of distinguished vintages, from which he had brought of such to Glen-

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ruadh as would best bear the carriage. Having no aspiration, there was room in him for any number of petty ambitions; and it vexed him not to reap the harvest of recognition. "But of course," he said to himself, "no highlander understands anything but whisky!"

"You don't mean you're a teetotaler, Macruadh!" he said.

"No," answered the chief; "I do not call myself one; but I never drink anything strong."

"Not on Christmas-day? Of course you make an exception at times; and if at any time, why not on the merriest day of the year? You are under no pledge!"

"If that were a reason," returned Alister, laughing, "it would rather be one for becoming pledged immediately."

"Well, you surprise me! And highlanders too! I thought better of all highlanders; they have the reputation of good men at the bottle! You make me sorry to have brought my wine where it meets with

no consideration.—Mr. Ian, you are a man of the world: you will not refuse to pledge me?"

"I must, Mr. Palmer! The fact is, my brother and I have seen so much evil come of the drinking habits of the country, which always get worse in a time of depression, that we dare not give in to them. My father, who was clergyman of the parish before he became head of the clan, was of the same mind before us, and brought us up not to drink. Throughout a whole Siberian winter I kept the rule."

"And got frost-bitten for your pains?"

"And found myself nothing the worse."

"It's mighty good of you, no doubt!" said the host, with a curl of his shaven lip.

"You can hardly call that good which does not involve any self-denial!" remarked Alister.

"Well," said Mr. Peregrine Palmer, "what *is* the world coming to? All the pith is leaking out of our young men. In

another generation we shall have neither soldiers nor sailors nor statesmen!"

"On what do you found such a sad conclusion?" inquired Ian.

"On the growth of asceticism in the young men. Believe me, it is necessary to manhood that men when they are young should drink a little, gamble a little, and sow a few wild oats—as necessary as that a nation should found itself by the law of the strongest. How else can we look for the moderation to follow with responsibilities? The vices that are more than excusable in the young, are very properly denied to the married man; the law for him is not the same as for the young man. I do not plead for license, you see; but it will never do for young men to turn ascetics! Let the clergy do as they please; they are hardly to be counted men; at least their calling is not a manly one! Depend upon it, young men who do not follow the dictates of nature—while they are young, I mean—will never make any

mark in the world! They dry up like a nut, brain and all, and have neither spirit, nor wit, nor force of any kind. Nature knows best! When I was a young man,——"

"Pray spare us confession, Mr. Palmer," said Ian. "In our case your doctrine does not enter willing ears, and I should be sorry anything we might feel compelled to say, should have the appearance of personality."

"Do you suppose I should heed anything you said?" cried the host, betraying the bad blood in his breeding. "Is it manners here to prevent a man from speaking his mind at his own table? I say a saint is not a man! A fellow that will neither look at a woman nor drink his glass, is not cut out for man's work in the world!"

Like a sledge-hammer came the fist of the laird on the table, that the crystal danced and rang.

"My God!" he exclaimed, and rose in hugest indignation.

Ian laid his hand on his arm, and he sat down again.

"There may be some misunderstanding, Alister," said Ian, "between us and our host!—Pray, Mr. Palmer, let us understand each other: do you believe God made woman to be the slave of man? Can you believe he ever made a woman that she might be dishonoured?—that a man might caress and despise her?"

"I know nothing about God's intentions; all I say is, we must obey the laws of our nature."

"Is conscience then not a law of our nature? Or is it below the level of our instincts? Must not the lower laws be subject to the higher? It is a law—for ever broken, yet eternal—that a man is his brother's keeper: still more must he be his sister's keeper. Therein is involved all civilization, all national as well as individual growth."

Mr. Peregrine Palmer smiled a contemptuous smile. The other young men

exchanged glances that seemed to say, "The governor knows what's what!"

"Such may be the popular feeling in this out-of-the-way spot," said Mr. Peregrine Palmer, "and no doubt it is very praiseworthy, but the world is not of your opinion, gentlemen."

"The world has got to come to our opinion," said the laird—at which the young men of the house broke into a laugh.

"May we join the ladies?" said Ian, rising.

"By all means," answered the host, with a laugh meant to be good-humoured; "they are the fittest company for you."

As the brothers went up the stair, they heard their host again holding forth; but they would not have been much edified by the slight change of front he had made—to impress on the young men the necessity of moderation in their pleasures.

There are two opposite classes related by a like unbelief—those who will not believe in the existence of the good of which they

have apprehended no approximate instance, and those who will not believe in the existence of similar evil. I tell the one class, there are men who would cast their very being from them rather than be such as they; and the other, that their shutting of their eyes is no potent reason for the shutting of my mouth. There are multitudes delicate as they, who are compelled to meet evil face to face, and fight with it the sternest of battles: on their side may I be found! What the Lord knew and recognized, I will know and recognize too, be shocked who may. I spare them, however, any more of the talk at that dinner-table. Only let them take heed lest their refinement involve a very bad selfishness. Cursed be the evil thing, not ignored! Mrs. Palmer, sweet-smiled and clear-eyed, never showed the least indignation at her husband's doctrines. I fear she was devoid of indignation on behalf of others. Very far are such from understanding the ways of the all-pardoning, all-punishing Father!

The three from the cottage were half-way home ere the gentlemen of the New House rose from their wine. Then first the mother sought an explanation of the early departure they had suggested.

"Something went wrong, sons: what was it she said?"

"I don't like the men, mother; nor does Ian," answered Alister gloomily.

"Take care you are not unjust!" she replied.

"You would not have liked Mr. Palmer's doctrine any better than we did, mother."

"What was it?"

"We would rather not tell you."

"It was not fit for a woman to hear."

"Then do not tell me. I trust you to defend women."

"In God's name we will!" said Alister.

"There is no occasion for an oath, Alister!" said his mother.

"Alister meant it very solemnly!" said Ian.

"Yes; but it was not necessary—least of

all to me. The name of our Lord God should lie a precious jewel in the cabinet of our hearts, to be taken out only at great times, and with loving awe."

"I shall be careful, mother," answered Alister; "but when things make me sorry, or glad, or angry, I always think of God first!"

"I understand you; but I fear taking the name of God in vain."

"It shall not be in vain, mother!" said the laird.

"Must it be a breach with our new neighbours?" asked the mother.

"It will depend on them. The thing began because we would not drink with them."

"You did not make any remark?"

"Not until our host's remarks called for our reasons. By the way, I should like to know how the man made his money."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BROTHERS.

Events, then, because of the deeper things whence they came, seemed sorely against any cordial approach of the old and the new houses of Glenruadh. But there was a sacred enemy within the stronghold of Mr. Peregrine Palmer, and that enemy forbade him to break with the young highlanders notwithstanding the downright mode in which they had expressed their difference with him: he felt, without knowing it, ashamed of the things he had uttered; they were not such as he would wish proclaimed from the house-tops out of the midst of which rose heavenward the spire of the church he had built; neither did the fact

that he would have no man be wicked on Sundays, make him feel quite right in urging young men to their swing on other days.

Christian and Sercombe could not but admire the straightforwardness of the brothers; their conventionality could not prevent them from feeling the dignity with which they acted on their convictions. The quixotic young fellows ought not to be cut for their behaviour! They could not court their society, but would treat them with consideration! Things could not well happen to bring them into much proximity!

What had taken place could not definitely influence the ideas, feelings, or opinions of the young ladies. Their father would sooner have had his hand cut off than any word said over that fuliginous dessert reach the ears of his daughters. Is it not an absolute damnation of certain evil principles, that many men would be flayed alive rather than let those they love know that they hold them? But see the

selfishness of such men: each looks with scorn on the woman he has done his part to degrade, but not an impure breath must reach the ears of *his* children! Another man's he will send to the devil!

Mr. Palmer did, however, communicate something of the conversation to his wife; and although she had neither the spirit, nor the insight, nor the active purity, to tell him he was in the wrong, she did not like the young highlanders the worse. She even thought it a pity the world should have been so made that they could not be in the right.

It is wonderful how a bird of the air will carry a matter, and some vaguest impression of what had occurred alighted on the minds of the elder girls—possibly from hints supposed unintelligible, passing between Mr. Sercombe and Christian: something in the social opinions of the two highlanders made those opinions differ much from the opinions prevailing in society! Now even Mercy had not escaped some

notion of things of which the air about her was full; and she felt the glow of a conscious attraction towards men—somehow, she did not know how—like old-fashioned knights errant in their relations to women.

The attachment between the brothers was unusual both in kind and degree. Alister regarded Ian as his better self, through whom to rise above himself; Ian looked up to his brother as the head of the family, uniting in himself all ancestral claims, the representative of an ordered and harmonious commonwealth. He saw in Alister virtues and powers he did not recognize in himself. His love blossomed into the deeper devotion that he only had been sent to college: he was bound to share with his elder brother what he had learned. So Alister got more through Ian than he would have got at the best college in the world. For Ian was a born teacher, and found intensest delight, not in imparting knowledge—that is a comparatively poor thing — but in leading a

mind up to see what it was before incapable of seeing. It was part of the same gift that he always knew when he had not succeeded. In Alister he found a wonderful docility—crossed indeed with a great pride, against which he fought sturdily.

It is not a good sign of any age that it should find it hard to believe in such simplicity and purity as that of these young men; it is perhaps even a worse sign of our own that we should find it difficult to believe in such love between men. I am sure of this, that a man incapable of loving another man with hearty devotion, can not be capable of loving a woman as a woman ought to be loved. From each other these two kept positively nothing secret.

Alister had a great love of music, which however had had little development except from the study of the violin, with the assistance of a certain poor enough performer in the village, and what criticism his brother could afford him, who, not himself a player, had heard much good music.

But Alister was sorely hampered by the fact that his mother could not bear the sound of it. The late chief was one of the few clergymen who played the violin; and at the first wail of the old instrument in the hands of his son, his widow was seized with such a passion of weeping, that Alister took the utmost care she should never hear it again, always carrying it to some place too remote for the farthest-travelling tones to reach her. But this was not easy, for sound will travel very far among the hills. At times he would take it to the room behind Annie's shop, at times to the hut occupied by Hector of the Stags: there he would not excruciate his host at least, and Rob of the Angels would endure anything for his chief. The place which he most preferred was too distant to be often visited; but there, soon after Christmas, the brothers now resolved to have a day together, a long talk, and a conference with the violin. On a clear frosty morning in January they set out, provided for a night and two days.

The place was upon an upland pasture-ground, yet in their possession: no farm was complete without a range in some high valley for the sheep and cattle in summer. On the north of this valley stood a bare hill-top, whose crest was a limestone rock, rising from the heather about twenty feet. Every summer they had spent weeks of their boyhood with the shepherds, in the society of this hill, and one day discovered in its crest a shallow cave, to which thereafter they often took their food, and the book they were reading together. There they read the English Ossian, troubled by no ignorant unbelief; and there they made Gaelic songs, in which Alister excelled, while Ian did better in English.

When Ian was at home in the university-vacations, they were fonder than ever of going to the hill. There Ian would pour out to Alister of the fullness of his gathered knowledge, and there and then they made their first acquaintance with Shakspere. Ian had bought some dozen of his plays, in

smallest compass and cleanest type, at a penny a piece, and how they revelled in them the long summer evenings! Ian had bought also, in a small thick volume, the poems of Shelley: these gave them not only large delight, but much to talk about, for they were quite capable of encountering his vague philosophy. Then they had their Euclid and Virgil—and even tried their mental teeth upon Dante, but found the Commedia without notes too hard a nut for them. Every fresh spring, Ian brought with him fresh books, and these they read in their cave. But I must not forget the cave itself, which also shared in the progress of its troglodytes.

The same week in which they first ate and read in it, they conceived and began to embody the idea of developing the hollow into a house. Foraging long ago in their father's library for mental pabulum, they had come upon Belzoni's quarto, and had read, with the avidity of imaginative boys, the tale of his discoveries, taking especial

delight in his explorations of the tombs of the kings in the rocks of Beban el Malook: these it was that now suggested excavation.

They found serviceable tools about the place at home, and the rock was not quite of the hardest. Not a summer, for the last seventeen years, had passed without a good deal being done, Alister working alone when Ian was away, and the cave had now assumed notable dimensions. It was called by the people *uamh an ceann*, the cave of the chief, and regarded as his country house. All around it was covered with snow throughout the winter and spring, and supplied little to the need of man beyond the blessed air, and a glorious vision of sea and land, mountain and valley, falling water, gleaming lake, and shadowy cliff.

Crossing the wide space where so lately they had burned the heather that the sheep might have its young shoots in the spring, the brothers stood, and gazed around with delight.

"There is nothing like this anywhere!" said Ian.

"Do you mean nothing so beautiful?" asked Alister.

"No; I mean just what I say: there is nothing like it. I do not care a straw whether one scene be more or less beautiful than another; what I do care for is—its individual speech to my soul. I feel towards visions of nature as towards writers. If a book or a prospect produces in my mind a mood that no other produces, then I feel it individual, original, real, therefore precious. If a scene or a song play upon the organ of my heart as no other scene or song could, why should I ask at all whether it be beautiful? A bare hill may be more to me than a garden of Damascus, but I love them both. The first question as to any work of art is whether it puts the willing soul into any mood at all peculiar; the second, what that mood is. It matters to me little by whom our Ossian was composed, and it matters nothing whoever may in his ignorance declare that there never was an Ossian any more than a Homer:

here is a something that has power over my heart and soul, works upon them as not anything else does. I do not ask whether its power be great or small; it is enough that it is a peculiar power, one by itself; that it puts my spiritual consciousness in a certain individual condition, such in character as nothing else can occasion. Either a man or a nation must have felt to make me so feel."

They were now climbing the last slope of the hill on whose top stood their playhouse, dearer now than in their boyhood. Alister occasionally went there for a few hours' solitude, and Ian would write there for days at a time, but in general when they visited the place it was together. Alister unlocked the door and they entered.

Unwilling to spend labour on the introductory, they had made the first chamber hardly larger than the room required for opening the door. Immediately within, another door opened into a room of about eight feet by twelve, with two small

windows. Its hearth was a projection from the floor of the live stone; and there, all ready for lighting, was a large pile of peats. The chimney went up through the rock, and had been the most difficult part of their undertaking. They had to work it much wider than was necessary for the smoke, and then to reduce its capacity with stone and lime. Now and then it smoked, but peat-smoke is sweet.

The first thing after lighting the fire, was to fill their kettle, for which they had to take off the snow-lid of a small spring near at hand. Then they made a good meal of tea, mutton-ham, oatcakes and butter. The only seats in the room were a bench in each of two of the walls, and a chair on each side of the hearth, all of the live rock.

From this opened two rooms more—one a bedroom, with a bed in the rock-wall, big enough for two. Dry heather stood thick between the mattress and the stone. The third room, of which they intended making

a parlour, was not yet more than half excavated; and there, when they had rested a while, they began to bore and chip at the stone. Their progress was slow, for the grain was close: never, even when the snow above was melting, had the least moisture come through. For a time they worked and talked: both talked better when using their hands. Then Alister stopped, and played while Ian went on; Ian stopped next, and read aloud from a manuscript he had brought, while his brother again worked. But first he gave Alister the history of what he was going to read. It was suggested, he said, by that strange poem of William Mayne's, called "The Dead Man's Moan," founded on the silly notion that the man himself is buried, and not merely his body.

"I wish I were up to straught my banes,
And drive frae my face the cauld, dead air;
I wish I were up, that the friendly rains
Micht wash the dark mould frae my tangled hair!"

quoted Ian, and added,

"I thought I should like to follow out the idea, and see what ought to come of it. I therefore supposed a person seized by something of the cataleptic kind, from which he comes to himself still in the body, but unable to hold communication with the outer world. He thinks therefore that he is dead and buried. Recovering from his first horror, he reflects that, as he did not make himself think and feel, nor can cease to think and feel if he would, there must be somewhere—and where but within himself? —the power by which he thinks and feels, a power whose care it must be, for it can belong to no other, to look after the creature he has made. Then comes to him the prayer of Job, 'Oh that thou wouldst hide me in the grave till thy anger with me was past! Then wouldst thou desire to see again the work of thy hands, the creature thou hadst made! Then wouldst thou call, and I would answer.' So grandly is the man comforted thereby, that he breaks out in a dumb song of triumph over death and the

grave. As its last tone dies in him, a kiss falls upon his lips. It is the farewell of the earth; the same moment he bursts the bonds and rises above the clouds of the body, and enters into the joy of his Lord."

Having thus prepared Alister to hear without having to think as well as attend, which is not good for poetry, Ian read his verses. I will not trouble my reader with them; I am sure he would not think so well of them as did Alister. What Ian desired was sympathy, not admiration, but from Alister he had both.

Few men would care to hear the talk of those two, for they had no interest in anything that did not belong to the reality of things. To them the things most men count real, were the merest phantasms. They sought what would not merely last, but must go on growing. At strife with all their known selfishness, they were growing into strife with all the selfishness in them as yet unknown. There was for them no question of choice; they *must* choose what

was true; they *must* choose life; they *must not* walk in the way of death.

They were very near to agreeing about *every*thing they should ask. Few men are capable of understanding such love as theirs, of understanding the love of David and Jonathan, of Shakspere to W. H., of Tennyson and Hallam. Every such love, nevertheless, is a possession of the race; what has once been is, in possibility to come, as well as in fact that has come. A solitary instance of anything great is enough to prove it human, yea necessary to humanity. I have wondered whether the man in whom such love is possible, may not spring of an altogether happy conjunction of male and female—a father and mother who not only loved each other, but were of the same mind in high things, of the same lofty aims in life, so that their progeny came of their true man-and-womanhood. If any unaccountable disruption or discord of soul appear in a man, it is worth while to ask whether his father and mother

were of one aspiration. Might not the fact that their marriage did not go deep enough, that father and mother were not of one mind, only of one body, serve to account for the rude results of some marriages of personable people? At the same time we must not forget the endless and unfathomable perpetuations of ancestry. But however these things may be, those two men, brothers born, were also brothers willed.

They ceased quarrying, and returned to the outer room. Ian betook himself to drawing figures on one of the walls, with the intention of carving them in dipped relief. Alister proceeded to take their bedding from before the fire, and prepare for the night.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRINCESS.

While they were thus busied, Ian, with his face to the wall, in the dim light of the candle by which he was making his first rough sketches, began the story of his flight from Russia. Long ere he ended, Alister came close behind him, and there stood, his bosom heaving with emotion, his eyes burning with a dry fire. Ian was perfectly composed, his voice quiet and low.

I will not give his tale in the first person; and will tell of it only as much as I think it necessary my reader should know.

Having accepted a commission of the Czar, he was placed in a post of trust in the palace.

In one apartment of it, lived an imperial princess, the burden of whose rank had not even the alleviation of society. Her disclosure of a sympathy with oppressed humanity had wakened a doubt as to her politics, and she was virtually a prisoner, restricted to a corner of the huge dwelling, and allowed to see hardly any but her women. Her father had fallen into disgrace before her, and her mother was dead of grief. All around her were spies, and love was nowhere. Gladly would she have yielded every rag of her rank, to breathe the air of freedom. To be a peasant girl on her father's land, would be a life of rapture!

She knew little of the solace books might have given her. With a mind capable of rapid development, she had been ill taught except in music; and that, alone, cannot do much for spiritual development; it cannct enable the longing, the aspiration it rouses, to understand itself; it cannot lead back to its own eternal source.

She knew no one in whom to trust, or

from whom to draw comfort; her confessor was a man of the world, incapable of leading her to any fountain of living water; she had no one to tell her of God and his fatherhood, the only and perfect refuge from the divine miseries of loneliness.

A great corridor went from end to end of one of the wings of the palace, and from this corridor another passage led toward the apartment of the princess, consisting of some five or six rooms. At certain times of the day, Ian had to be at the beginning of the corridor, at the head of a huge stair with a spacious hall-like landing. Along the corridor few passed, for the attendants used a back stair and passages. As he sat in the recess of a large window, where stood a table and chair for his use, Ian one morning heard a cry—whence, he never knew—and darted along the corridor, thinking assistance might be wanted. When about halfway down, he saw a lady enter, near the end of it, and come slowly along. He stood aside, respectfully waiting till she should

pass. Her eyes were on the ground, but as she came near she raised them. The sadness of them went to his heart, and his soul rushed into his. The princess, I imagine, had never before met such an expression, and misunderstood it. Lonely, rejected, too helpless even to hope, it seemed full of something she had all her life been longing for—a soul to be her refuge from the wind, her covert from the tempest, her shadow as of a great rock in the weary land where no one cared for her. She stood and gazed at him.

Ian at once perceived who she must be, and stood waiting for some expression of her pleasure. But she appeared fascinated; her eyes remained on his, for they seemed to her to be promising help. Her fascination fascinated him, and for some moments they stood thus, regarding each other. Ian felt he must break the spell. It was her part to speak, his to obey, but he knew the danger of the smallest suspicion. If she was a princess and he

but a soldier on guard, she was a woman and he was a man: he was there to protect her! "How may I serve your imperial highness?" he asked. She was silent yet a moment, then said, "Your name?" He gave it. "Your nation?" He stated it. "When are you here?" He told her his hours. "I will see you again," she said, and turned and went back.

From that moment she loved him, and thought he loved her. But, though he would willingly have died for her, he did not love her as she thought. Alister wondered to hear him say so. At such a moment, and heart-free, Alister could no more have helped falling in love with her than he could help opening his eyes when the light shone on their lids. Ian, with a greater love for his kind than even Alister, and with a tenderness for womankind altogether infinite, was not ready to fall in love. Accessible indeed he was to the finest of Nature's witcheries; ready for the response as of summer lightnings from opposing

horizons; all aware of loveliest difference, of refuge and mysterious complement; but he was not prone to fall in love.

The princess, knowing the ways of the house, contrived to see him pretty often. He talked to her of the best he knew; he did what he could to lighten her loneliness by finding her books and music; best of all, he persuaded her—without difficulty—to read the New Testament. In their few minutes of conference, he tried to show her the Master of men as he showed himself to his friends; but their time together was always so short, and their anxiety for each other so great, seeing that discovery would be ruin to both, that they could not go far with anything.

At length came an occasion when at parting they embraced. How it was Ian could not tell. He blamed himself much, but Alister thought it might not have been his fault. The same moment he was aware that he did not love her and that he could not turn back. He was ready to do any-

thing, everything in honour; yet felt false inasmuch as he had given her ground for believing that he felt towards her as he could not help seeing she felt towards him. Had it been in his power to order his own heart, he would have willed to love, and so would have loved her. But the princess doubted nothing, and the change that passed upon her was wonderful. The power of human love is next to the power of God's love. Like a flower long repressed by cold, she blossomed so suddenly in the sunshine of her bliss, that Ian greatly dreaded the suspicion which the too evident alteration might arouse: the plain, ordinary-looking young woman with fine eyes, began to put on the robes of beauty. A softest vapour of rose, the colour of the east when sun-down sets it dreaming of sunrise, tinged her cheek; it grew round like that of a girl; and ere two months were gone, she looked years younger than her age. But Ian could never be absolutely open with her; while she, poor princess, happy in her

ignorance of the shows of love, and absorbed in the joy of its great deliverance, jealoused nothing of restraint, nothing of lack, either in his words or in the caresses of which he was religiously sparing. He was haunted by the dread of making her grieve who had already grieved so much, and was but just risen from the dead.

One evening they met as usual in the twilight; in five minutes the steps of the man would be heard coming to light the lamps of the corridor, his guard would be over, and he must retire. Few words passed, but they parted with more of lingering tenderness than usual, and the princess put a little packet in his hand. The same night his only friend in the service entered his room hurriedly, and urged immediate flight: something had been, or was imagined to be discovered, through which his liberty, perhaps his life, was compromised; he must leave at once by a certain coach which would start in an hour: there was but just time to disguise him; he must make for a

certain port on the Baltic, and there lie concealed until a chance of getting away turned up!

Ian refused. He feared nothing, had done nothing to be ashamed of! What was it to him if they did take his life! he could die as well as another! Anxious about the princess, he persisted in his refusal, and the coach went without him. Every passenger in that coach was murdered. He saw afterward the signs of their fate in the snow.

In the middle of the night, a company of men in masks entered his room, muffled his head, and hurried him into a carriage, which drove rapidly away.

When it stopped, he thought he had arrived at some prison, but soon found himself in another carriage, with two of the police. He could have escaped had he been so minded, but he could do nothing for the princess, and did not care what became of him. At a certain town his attendants left him, with the assurance that

if he did not make haste out of the country, he would find they had not lost sight of him.

But instead of obeying, he disguised himself, and took his way to Moscow, where he had friends. Thence he wrote to his friend at St. Petersburg. Not many letters passed ere he learned that the princess was dead. She had been placed in closer confinement, her health gave way, and by a rapid decline she had gained her freedom.

All the night through, not closing their eyes till the morning, the brothers, with many intervals of thoughtful silence, lay talking.

"I am glad to think," said Alister, after one of these silences, "you do not suffer so much, Ian, as if you had been downright in love with her."

"I suffer far more," answered Ian with a sigh; "and I ought to suffer more. It breaks my heart to think she had not so much from me as she thought she had."

They were once more silent. Alister was

full of trouble for his brother. Ian at length spoke again.

"Alister," he said, "I must tell you everything! I know the truth now. If I wronged her, she is having her revenge!"

By his tone Alister seemed through the darkness to see his sad smile. He was silent, and Alister waited.

"She did not know much," Ian resumed. "I thought at first she had nothing but good manners and a good heart; but the moment the sun of another heart began to shine on her, the air of another's thought to breathe upon her, the room of another soul to surround her, she began to grow; and what more could God intend or man desire? As I told you, she grew beautiful, and what sign of life is equal to that!"

"But I want to know what you mean by her having her revenge on you?" said Alister.

"Whether I loved her then or not, and I believe I did, beyond a doubt I love her now. It needed only to be out of sight of

her, and see other women beside the memory of her, to know that I loved her.—Alister, I *love her!*" repeated Ian with a strange exaltation.

"Oh, Ian!" groaned Alister; "how terrible for you!"

"Alister, you dear fellow!" returned Ian, "can you understand no better than that? Do you not see I am happy now? My trouble was that I did not love her—not that she loved me, but that I did not love her! Now we shall love each other for ever!"

"How do you know that, Ian?"

"By knowing that I love her. If I had not come to know that, I could not have said to myself I would love her for ever."

"But you can't marry her, Ian! The Lord said there would be no marrying there!"

"Did he say there would be no loving there, Alister? Most people seem to fancy he did, for how else could they forget the dead as they do, and look so little for their resur-

rection? Few can be said really to believe in any hereafter worth believing in. How many go against the liking of the dead the moment they are gone—behave as if they were nowhere, and could never call them to account! Their plans do not recognize their existence; the life beyond is no factor in their life here. If God has given me a hope altogether beyond anything I could have generated for myself, beyond all the likelihoods and fulfilments around me, what can I do but give him room to verify it—what but look onward! Some people's bodies get so tired that they long for the rest of the grave; it is my soul that gets tired, and I know the grave can give that no rest; I look for the rest of more life, more strength, more love. But God is not shut up in heaven, neither is there one law of life there and another here; I desire more life here, and shall have it, for what is needful for this world is to be had in this world. In proportion as I become one with God, I shall have it. This world never did

seem my home; I have never felt quite comfortable in it; I have yet to find, and shall find the perfect home I have not felt this world, even my mother's bosom to be. Nature herself is not lovely enough to satisfy me. Nor can it be that I am beside myself, seeing I care only for the will of God, not for my own. For what is madness but two or more wills in one body? Does not the Bible itself tell us that we are pilgrims and strangers in the world, that here we have no abiding city? It is but a place to which we come to be made ready for another. Yet I am sure those who regard it as their home, are not half so well pleased with it as I. They are always grumbling at it. 'What wretched weather!' they say. 'What a cursed misfortune!' they cry. 'What abominable luck!' they protest. Health is the first thing, they say, and cannot find it. They complain that their plans are thwarted, and when they succeed, that they do not yield the satisfaction they expected. Yet they mock at him who says he seeks a

better country!—But I am keeping you awake, Alister! I will talk no more. You must go to sleep!"

"It is better than any sleep to hear you talk, Ian," returned Alister. "What a way you are ahead of me! I do love this world! When I come to die, it will tear my heart to think that this cave which you and I have dug out together, must pass into other hands! I love every foot of the earth that remains to us—every foot that has been taken from us. When I stand on the top of this rock, and breathe the air of this mountain, I bless God we have still a spot to call our own. It is quite a different thing from the love of mere land; I could not feel the same toward any, however beautiful, that I had but bought. This, our own old land, I feel as if I loved in something the same way as I love my mother. Often in the hot summer-days, lying on my face in the grass, I have kissed the earth as if it were a live creature that could return my caresses! The long

grass is a passion to me, and next to the grass I love the heather, not the growing corn. I am a fair farmer, I think, but I would rather see the land grow what it pleased, than pass into the hands of another. Place is to me sacred almost as body. There is at least something akin between the love we bear to the bodies of our friends, and that we bear to the place in which we were born and brought up."

"That is all very true, Alister. I understand your feeling perfectly; I have it myself. But we must be weaned, I say only *weaned*, from that kind of thing; we must not love the outside as if it were the inside! Everything comes that we may know the sender—of whom it is a symbol, that is, a far-off likeness of something in him; and to him it must lead us—the self-existent, true, original love, the making love. But I have felt all you say. I used to lie in bed and imagine the earth alive and carrying me on her back, till I fell

asleep longing to see the face of my nurse. Once, the fancy turned into a dream. I will try to recall a sonnet I made the same night, before the dream came: it will help you to understand it. I was then about nineteen, I believe. I did not care for it enough to repeat it to you, and I fear we shall find it very bad."

Stopping often to recall and rearrange words and lines, Ian completed at last the following sonnet:—

"She set me on my feet with steady hand,
Among the crowding marvels on her face,
Bidding me rise, and run a strong man's race;
Swathed me in circumstance's swaddling band;
Fed me with her own self; then bade me stand
*My*self entire,—while she was but a place
Hewn for my dwelling from the midst of space,—
A something better than *her* sea or land.
Nay, Earth! thou bearest me upon thy back,
Like a rough nurse, and I can almost feel
A touch of kindness in thy hands of steel,
Although I cannot see thy face, and track
An onward purpose shining through its black,
Instinct with prophecy of future weal.

"There! It is not much, is it?"

"It is beautiful!" protested Alister.

"It is worth nothing," said Ian, "except between you and me—and that it will make you understand my dream. That I shall never forget. When a dream does us good we don't forget it.

"I thought I was borne on the back of something great and strong—I could not tell what; it might be an elephant or a great eagle or a lion. It went sweeping swiftly along, the wind of its flight roaring past me in a tempest. I began to grow frightened. Where could this creature of such awful speed be carrying me? I prayed to God to take care of me. The head of the creature turned to me, and I saw the face of a woman, grand and beautiful. Never with my open eyes have I seen such a face! And I knew it was the face of this earth, and that I had never seen it before because she carries us upon her back. When I woke, I knew that all the strangest things in life and history must one day come together in a beautiful face of loving purpose, one of the faces of the living God.

The very mother of the Lord did not for a long time understand him, and only through sorrow came to see true glory. Alister, if we were right with God, we could see the earth vanish and never heave a sigh; God, of whom it was but a shimmering revelation, would still be ours!"

In the morning they fell asleep, and it was daylight, late in the winter, when Alister rose. He roused the fire, asleep all through the night, and prepared their breakfast of porridge and butter, tea, oat-cake, and mutton-ham. When it was nearly ready, he woke Ian, and when they had eaten, they read together a portion of the Bible, that they might not forget, and start the life of the day without trust in the life-causing God.

"All that is not rooted in him," Ian would say, "all hope or joy that does not turn its face upward, is an idolatry. Our prayers must rise that our thoughts may follow them."

The portion they read contained the

saying of the Lord that we must forsake all and follow him if we would be his disciples.

"I am sometimes almost terrified," said Ian, "at the scope of the demands made upon me, at the perfection of the self-abandonment required of me; yet outside of such absoluteness can be no salvation. In God we live every commonplace as well as most exalted moment of our being. To trust in *him* when no need is pressing, when things seem going right of themselves, may be harder than when things seem going wrong. At no time is there any danger except in ourselves, and the only danger is of trusting in something else than the living God, and so getting, as it were, outside of God. Oh Alister, take care you do not love the land more than the will of God! Take care you do not love even your people more than the will of God."

They spent the day on the hill-top, and as there was no sign of storm, remained

till the dark night, when the moon came to light them home.

"Perhaps when we are dead," said Alister as they went, "we may be allowed to come here again sometimes! Only we shall not be able to quarry any further, and there is pain in looking on what cannot go on."

"It may be a special pleasure," returned Ian, "in those new conditions, to look into such a changeless cabinet of the past. When we are one with our life, so that no prayer can be denied, there will be no end to the lovely possibilities."

"So I have the people I love, I think I could part with all things else, even the land!" said Alister.

"Be sure we shall not have to part with *them*. We shall yet walk, I think, with our father as of old, where the setting sun sent the shadows of the big horse-gowans that glowed in his red level rays, trooping eastward, as if they would go round the world to meet the sun that had banished

them, and die in his glory; the wind of the twilight will again breathe about us like a thought of the living God haunting our goings, and watching to help us; the stars will yet call to us out of the great night, 'Love and be fearless.' 'Be independent!' cries the world from its great Bible of the Belly;—says the Lord of men, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' Our dependence is our eternity. We cannot live on bread alone; we need every word of God. We cannot live on air alone; we need an atmosphere of living souls. Should we be freer, Alister, if we were independent of each other? When I am out in the world, my heart is always with mother and you. We must be constantly giving ourselves away, we must dwell in houses of infinite dependence, or sit alone in the waste of a godless universe."

It was a rough walk in the moonlight over the hills, but full of a rare delight.

And while they walked the mother was waiting them, with the joy of St. John, of the Saviour, of God himself in her heart, the joy of beholding how the men she loved loved each other.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO PAIRS.

The next morning, on the way to the village, the brothers overtook Christina and Mercy, and they walked along together.

The young men felt inclined to be the more friendly with the girls, that the men of their own family were so unworthy of them. A man who does not respect a woman because she is a woman, cannot have thorough respect for his own mother, protest as he pleases: he is incapable of it, and cannot know his own incapacity. Alas for girls in a family where the atmosphere of vile thinking, winnowed by the carrion wings of degraded and degrading judgments, infolds them! One of the marvels of the world is, that, with such fathers and

brothers, there are so few wicked women. Type of the greater number stands Ophelia, poor, weak, and not very refined, yet honest, and, in all her poverty, immeasurably superior to father and brother.

Christina's condescension had by this time dwindled almost to the vanishing-point, and her talk was in consequence more natural: the company, conversation, and whole atmosphere of the young men, tended to wake in the girls what was best and sweetest. Reality appeals at once to the real, opens the way for a soul to emerge from the fog of the commonplace, the marsh of platitude, the Sahara of lies, into the colour and air of life. The better things of humanity often need the sun of friendship to wile them out. A girl, well-bred, tolerably clever, and with some genius of accommodation, will appear to a man possessed of a hundred faculties of which she knows nothing; but his belief will help to rouse them in her. A young man will see an angel where those who love her best see

only a nice girl; but he sees not merely what she might be, but what one day she must be.

Christina had been at first rather taken with the ploughman, but she turned her masked batteries now mainly on the soldier. During the dinner she had noted how entirely Ian was what she chose to call a man of the world; and it rendered him in her eyes more worthy of conquest. Besides, as elder sister, must she not protect the inexperienced Mercy?

What is this passion for subjugation? this hunger for homage? Is it of hell direct, or what is there in it of good to begin with? Apparently it takes possession of such women as have set up each herself for the object of her worship: she cannot then rest from the effort to bring as many as possible to worship at the same shrine; and to this end will use means as deserving of the fire as any witchcraft.

Christina stopped short with a little cry, and caught Ian's arm.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "but I cannot bear it a moment longer! Something in my boot hurts me so!"

She limped to the road-side, sat down, accepted the service of Ian to unlace her boot, and gave a sigh of relief when he pulled it off. He inverted and shook it, then searched and found a nail which must have hurt her severely.

But how to get rid of the cruel projection! Ian's slender hand could but just reach with its finger-tips the haunted spot. In vain he tried to knock it down against a stone put inside. Alister could suggest nothing. But Mistress Conal's cottage was near: they might there find something to help! Only Christina could not be left behind, and how was she to walk in a silk stocking over a road frozen hard as glass? The chief would have carried her, but she would not let him. Ian therefore shod her with his Glengarry bonnet, tying it on with his handkerchief.

There was much merriment over the ex-

temporized shoe, mingled with apologetic gratitude from Christina, who, laughing at her poulticed foot, was yet not displeased at its contrast with the other.

When the chief opened the door of the cottage, there was no one to be seen within. The fire was burning hot and flameless; a three-footed pot stood half in it; other sign of presence they saw none. As Alister stooped searching for some implement to serve their need, in shot a black cat, jumped over his back, and disappeared. The same instant they heard a groan, and then first discovered the old woman in bed, seemingly very ill. Ian went up to her.

"What is the matter with you, Mistress Conal?" he asked, addressing her in English because of the ladies.

But in reply she poured out a torrent of Gaelic, which seemed to the girls only grumbling, but was something stronger. Thereupon the chief went and spoke to her, but she was short and sullen with him. He left her to resume his search.

"Let alone," she cried. "When that nail leaves her brog, it will be for your heart."

Ian sought to soothe her.

"She will bring misery on you all!" she insisted.

"You have a hammer somewhere, I know!" said Alister, as if he had not heard her.

"She shall be finding no help in *my* house!" answered the old woman in English.

"Very well, Mistress Conal!" returned the chief; "the lady cannot walk home; I shall have to carry her!"

"God forbid!" she cried. "Go and fetch a wheelbarrow."

"Mistress Conal, there is nothing for it but carry her home in my arms!"

"Give me the cursed brog then. I will draw the nail."

But the chief would not yield the boot; he went out and searched the hill-side until he found a smooth stone of suitable size,

with which and a pair of tongs, he beat down the nail. Christina put on the boot, and they left the place. The chief stayed behind the rest for a moment, but the old woman would not even acknowledge his presence.

"What a rude old thing she is! This is how she always treats us!" said Christina.

"Have you done anything to offend her?" asked Alister.

"Not that we know of. We can't help being lowlanders!"

"She no doubt bears you a grudge," said Ian, "for having what once belonged to us. I am sorry she is so unfriendly. It is not a common fault with our people."

"Poor old thing! what does it matter!" said Christina.

A woman's hate was to her no more than the barking of a dog.

They had not gone far, before the nail again asserted itself; it had been but partially subjugated. A consultation was held. It resulted in this, that Mercy and the chief

went to fetch another pair of boots, while Ian remained with Christina.

They seated themselves on a stone by the roadside. The sun clouded over, a keen wind blew, and Christina shivered. There was nothing for it but go back to the cottage. The key was in the door. Ian turned it, and they went in. Certainly this time no one was there. The old woman so lately groaning on her bed had vanished. Ian made up the fire, and did what he could for his companion's comfort.

She was not pleased with the tone of his attentions, but the way she accepted them made her appear more pleased than Ian cared for, and he became colder and more polite. Piqued by his indifference, she took it nevertheless with a sweetness which belonged to her nature as God made it, not as she had spoiled it; and even such a butterfly as she, felt the influence of a man like Ian, and could not help being more natural in his presence. His truth elicited what there was of hers; the true being

drew to the surface what there was of true in the being that was not true. The longer she was in his company, the more she was pleased with him, and the more annoyed with her failure in pleasing him.

It is generally more or less awkward when a young man and maiden between whom is no convergent rush of spiritual currents, find themselves alone together. Ian was one of the last to feel such awkwardness, but he thought his companion felt it; he did his best, therefore, to make her forget herself and him, telling her story after story which she could not but find the more interesting that for the time she was quieted from self, and placed in the humbler and healthier position of receiving the influence of another. For one moment, as he was narrating a hair's-breadth escape he had had from a company of Tartar soldiers by the friendliness of a young girl, the daughter of a Siberian convict, she found herself under the charm of a certain potency of which he was himself altogether unconscious, but which had

carried away hearts more indifferent than hers.

In the meantime, Alister and Mercy were walking toward the New House, and, walking, were more comfortable than those that sat waiting. Mercy indeed had not much to say, but she was capable of asking a question worth answering, and of understanding not a little. Thinking of her walk with Ian on Christmas day,—

"Would you mind telling me something about your brother?" she said.

"What would you like to know about him?" asked Alister.

"Anything you care to tell me," she answered.

Now there was nothing pleased Alister better than talking about Ian; and he talked so that Mercy could not help feeling what a brother he must be himself; while on his part Alister was delighted with the girl who took such an interest in Ian: for Ian's sake he began to love Mercy. He had never yet been what is called in love—

had had little opportunity indeed of falling in love. His breeding had been that of a gentleman, and notwithstanding the sweetness and gentleness of the maidens of his clan, there were differences which had as yet proved sufficient to prevent the first approaches of love, though, once entertained, they might have added to the depth of it. At the same time it was by no means impossible for Alister to fall in love with even an uneducated girl—so-called; neither would he, in that case, have felt any difficulty about marrying her; but the fatherly relation in which he stood toward his clan, had tended rather to prevent the thing. Many a youth falls to premature love-making, from the lack in his daily history of the womanly element. Matrons in towns should be exhorted to make of their houses a refuge. Too many mothers are anxious for what they count the welfare of their own children, and care nothing for the children of other women! But can we wonder, when they will wallow in mean-

nesses to save their own from poverty and health, and damn them into comfort and decay.

Alister told Mercy how Ian and he used to spend their boyhood. He recounted some of their adventures in hunting and herding and fishing, and even in going to and from school, a distance of five miles, in all weathers. Then he got upon the poetry of the people, their legends, their ballads and their songs; and at last came to the poetry of the country itself—the delights of following the plough, the whispers and gleams of nature, her endless appeal through every sense. The mere smell of the earth in a spring morning, he said, always made him praise God.

"Everything we have," he went on, "must be shared with God. That is the notion of the Jewish thank-offering. Ian says the greatest word in the universe is *one;* the next greatest, *all.* They are but the two ends of a word to us unknowable—God's name for himself."

Mercy had read Mrs. Barbauld's Hymns, and they had been something to her; but most of the little poetry she had read was only platitude sweetened with sound; she had never read, certainly never understood a real poem. Who can tell what a nature may prove, after feeding on good food for a while? The queen bee is only a better fed working bee. Who can tell what it may prove when it has been ploughed with the plough of suffering, when the rains of sorrow, the frosts of pain, and the winds of poverty have moistened and swelled and dried its fallow clods?

Mercy had not such a sweet temper as her sister, but she was not so selfish. She was readier to take offence, perhaps just because she was less self-satisfied. Before long they might change places. A little dew from the eternal fountain was falling upon them. Christina was beginning to be aware that a certain man, neither rich nor distinguished nor ambitious, had yet a real charm for her. Not that for a moment she

would think seriously of such a man! That would be simply idiotic! But it would be very nice to have a little innocent flirtation with him, or perhaps a "Platonic friendship!"—her phrase, not mine. What could she have to do with Plato, who, when she said *I*, was aware only of a neat bundle of foolish desires, not the God at her heart!

Mercy, on the other hand, was being drawn to the big, strong, childlike heart of the chief. There is always, notwithstanding the gulf of unlikeness between them, an appeal from the childish to the childlike. The childish is but the shadow of the childlike, and shadows are little like the things from which they fall. But to what save the heavenly shall the earthly appeal in its sore need, its widowhood, its orphanage? with what shall the childish take refuge but the childlike? to what shall ignorance cry but wisdom? Mercy felt no restraint with the chief as with Ian. His great, deep, yet refined and musical laugh, set her at ease. Ian's smile, with its shim-

mering eternity, was no more than the moon on a rain-pool to Mercy. The moral health of the chief made an atmosphere of conscious safety around her. By the side of no other man had she ever felt so. With him she was at home, therefore happy. She was already growing under his genial influence. Every being has such influence who is not selfish.

When Christina was re-shod, and they were leaving the cottage, Ian, happening to look behind him, spied the black cat perched on the edge of the chimney in the smoke.

"Look at her," he said, "pretending innocence, when she has been watching you all the time!"

Alister took up a stone.

"Don't hurt her," said Ian, and he dropped it.

CHAPTER VII.

AN CABRACH MÒR.

I HAVE already said that the young men had not done well as hunters. They had neither experience nor trustworthy attendance: none of the chief's men would hunt with them. They looked on them as intruders, and those who did not share in their chief's dislike to useless killing, yet respected it. Neither Christian nor Sercombe had yet shot a single stag, and the time was drawing nigh when they must return, the one to Glasgow, the other to London. To have no proof of prowess to display was humbling to Sercombe; he must show a stag's head, or hide his own! He resolved, therefore, one of the next moonlit nights, to stalk by

himself a certain great, wide-horned stag, of whose habits he had received information.

At Oxford, where Valentine made his acquaintance, Sercombe belonged to a fast set, but had distinguished himself notwithstanding as an athlete. He was a great favourite with a few, not the best of the set, and admired by many for his confidence, his stature, and his regular features. These latter wore, however, a self-assertion which of others made him much disliked: a mean thing in itself, it had the meanest origin—the ability, namely, to spend money, for he was the favourite son of a rich banker in London. He knew nothing of the first business of life—self-restraint, had never denied himself anything, and but for social influences would, in manhood as infancy, have obeyed every impulse. He was one of the merest slaves in the universe, a slave in his very essence, for he counted wrong to others freedom for himself, and the rejection of the laws of his own being, liberty. The most righteous interference was insolence; his

likings were his rights, and any devil that could whisper him a desire, might do with him as he pleased. From such a man every true nature shrinks with involuntary recoil, and a sick sense of the inhuman. But I have said more of him already than my history requires, and more than many a reader, partaking himself of his character to an unsuspected degree, will believe; for such men cannot know themselves. He had not yet in the eyes of the world disgraced himself: it takes a good many disgraceful things to bring a rich man to outward disgrace.

His sole attendant when shooting was a clever vagabond lad belonging to nowhere in particular, and living by any crook except the shepherd's. From him he heard of the great stag, and the spots which in the valleys he frequented, often scraping away the snow with his feet to get at the grass. He did not inform him that the animal was a special favourite with the chief of Clanruadh, or that the clan looked

upon him as their live symbol, the very stag represented as crest to the chief's coat of arms. It was the same Nancy had reported to her master as eating grass on the burn-side in the moonlight. Christian and Sercombe had stalked him day after day, but without success. And now, with one poor remaining hope, the latter had determined to stalk him at night. To despoil him of his life, his glorious rush over the mountain side, his plunge into the valley, and fierce strain up the opposing hill; to see that ideal of strength, suppleness, and joyous flight, lie nerveless and flaccid at his feet; to be able to call the thicket-like antlers of the splendid animal his own, was for the time the one ambition of Hilary Sercombe; for he was of the brood of Mephistopheles, the child of darkness, whose delight lies in undoing what God has done—the nearest that any evil power can come to creating.

There was, however, a reason for the failure of the young hunters beyond lack of

skill and what they called their ill-luck. Hector of the Stags was awake; his keen, everywhere-roving eyes were upon them, seconded by the keen, all-hearkening ears of Rob of the Angels. They had discovered that the two men had set their hearts on the big stag, *an cabrach mòr* by right of excellence, and every time they were out after him, Hector too was out with his spy-glass, the gift of an old sea-faring friend, searching the billowy hills. While the southrons would be toiling along to get the wind of him unseen, for the old stag's eyes were as keen as his velvety nose, the father and son would be lying, perhaps close at hand, perhaps far away on some hill-side of another valley, watching now the hunters, now the stag. For love of the Macruadh, and for love of the stag, they had constituted themselves his guardians. Again and again when one of them thought he was going to have a splendid chance—perhaps just as, having reached a rock to which he had been making his weary way over stones

and bogs like Satan through chaos, and raised himself with weary slowness, he peeped at last over the top, and lo, there he was, well within range, quietly feeding, nought between the great pumping of his big joyous heart and the hot bullet but the brown skin behind his left shoulder!—a distant shot would forestall the nigh one, a shot for life, not death, and the stag, knowing instantly by wondrous combination of sense and judgment in what quarter lay the danger, would, without once looking round, measure straight a hundred yards of hillocks and rocks between the sight-taking and the pulling of the trigger. Another time it would be no shot, but the bark of a dog, the cry of a moorfowl, or a signal from watching hind that started him; for the creatures understand each the other's cries, and when an animal sees one of any sort on the watch to warn covey or herd or flock of its own kind, it will itself keep no watch, but feed in security. To Christian and Sercombe it seemed as if all the life in the glen

were in conspiracy to frustrate their hearts' desire; and the latter at least grew ever the more determined to kill the great stag: he had begun to hate him.

The sounds that warned the stag were by no means always what they seemed, those of other wild animals; they were often but imitations by Rob of the Angels. I fear the animal grew somewhat bolder and less careful from the assurance thus given him that he was watched over, and cultivated a little nonchalance. Not a moment, however, did he neglect any warning from quarter soever, but from peaceful feeder was instantaneously wind-like fleër, his great horns thrown back over his shoulders, and his four legs just touching the ground with elastic hoof, or tucking themselves almost out of sight as he skipped rather than leaped over rock and gully, stone and bush—whatever lay betwixt him and larger room. Great joy it was to his two guardians to see him, and great game to watch the motions of his discomfited enemies. For the sake of *an cabrach*

mòr Hector and Rob would go hungry for hours. But they never imagined the luxurious Sasunnach, incapable, as they thought, of hardship or sustained fatigue, would turn from his warm bed to stalk the lordly animal betwixt snow and moon.

One night, Hector of the Stags found he could not sleep. It was not for cold, for the night was for the season a mild one. The snow indeed lay deep around their dwelling, but they owed not a little of its warmth to the snow. It drifted up all about it, and kept off the terrible winds that swept along the side of the hill, like sharp swift scythes of death. They were in the largest and most comfortable of their huts—a deepish hollow in the limestone rock, lined with turf, and with wattles filled in with heather, the tops outward; its front a thick wall of turf, with a tolerable door of deal. It was indeed so snug as to be far from airy. Here they kept what little store of anything they had—some dried fish and venison; a barrel of oat-meal, seldom filled

full; a few skins of wild creatures, and powder, ball, and shot.

After many fruitless attempts to catch the still fleeting vapour sleep, raising himself at last on his elbow, Hector found that Rob was not by his side.

He too had been unable to sleep, and at last discovered that he was uneasy about something—what, he could not tell. He rose and went out. The moon was shining very clear, and as there was much snow, the night, if not so bright as day, was yet brighter than many a day. The moon, the snow, the mountains, all dreaming awake, seemed to Rob the same as usual; but presently he fancied the hillside opposite had come nearer than usual: there must be a reason for that! He searched every yard of it with keenest gaze, but saw nothing.

They were high above Glenruadh, and commanded parts of it: late though it was, Rob thought he saw some light from the New House, which itself he could not see, reflected from some shadowed evergreen in

the shrubbery. He was thinking some one might be ill, and he ought to run down and see whether a messenger was wanted, when his father joined him. He had brought his telescope, and immediately began to sweep the moonlight on the opposite hill. In a moment he touched Rob on the shoulder, and handed him the telescope, pointing with it. Rob looked and saw a dark speck on the snow, moving along the hill-side. It was the big stag. Now and then he would stop to snuff and search for a mouthful, but was evidently making for one of his feeding-places—most likely that by the burn on the chief's land. The light! could it imply danger? He had heard the young men were going to leave: were they about to attempt a last assault on the glory of the glen? He pointed out to his father the dim light in the shadow of the house. Hector turned his telescope thitherward, immediately gave the glass to Rob, went into the hut, and came out again with his gun.

They had not gone far when they lost

sight of the stag, but they held on towards the castle. At every point whence a peep could be had in the direction of the house, they halted to reconnoitre: if enemies were abroad, they must, if possible, get and keep sight of them. They did not stop for more than a glance, however, but made for the valley as fast as they could walk: the noise of running feet would, on such a still night, be heard too far. The whole way, without sound uttered, father and son kept interchanging ideas on the matter.

From thorough acquaintance with the habits of the animal, they were pretty certain he was on his way to the haunt aforementioned: if he got there, he would be safe; it was the chief's ground, and no one would dare touch him. But he was not yet upon it, and was in danger; while, if he should leave the spot in any westward direction, he would almost at once be out of sanctuary! If they found him therefore at his usual feed, and danger threatening, they must scare him eastward; if no peril

seemed at hand, they would watch him a while, that he might feed in safety. Swift and all but soundless on their quiet brogs they paced along: to startle the deer while the hunter was far off, might be to drive him within range of his shot.

They reached the root of the spur, and approached the castle; immediately beyond that, they would be in sight of the feeding ground. But they were yet behind it when Rob of the Angels bounded forward in terror at the sound of a gun. His father, however, who was in front, was off before him. Neither hearing anything, nor seeing Rob, he knew that a shot had been fired, and, caution being now useless, was in a moment at full speed. The smoke of the shot hung white in the moonlight over the end of the ridge. No red bulk shadowed the green pasture, no thicket of horns went shaking about over the sod. No lord of creation, but an enemy of life, stood regarding his work, a tumbled heap of death, yet saying to himself, like God when he made

the world, "It is good." The noble creature lay disformed on the grass; shot through the heart he had leaped high in the air, fallen with his head under him, and broken his neck.

Rage filled the heart of Hector of the Stags. He could not curse, but he gave a roar like a wild beast, and raised his gun. But Rob of the Angels caught it ere it reached his shoulder. He yielded it, and, with another roar like a lion, bounded barehanded upon the enemy. He took the descent in three leaps, and the burn in one. It was not merely that the enemy had killed *an cabrach mòr*, the great stag of their love; he had killed him on the chief's own land! under the very eyes of the man whose business it was to watch over him! It was an offence unpardonable! an insult as well as a wrong to his chief! In the fierce majesty of righteous wrath he threw himself on the poacher. Sercombe met him with a blow straight from the shoulder, and he dropped.

Rob of the Angels, close behind him, threw down the gun. The devil all but got into Rob of the Angels. His knife flashed pale in the moonlight, and he darted on the Sasunnach. It would then have gone ill with the bigger man, for Rob was lithe as a snake, swift not only to parry and dodge but to strike; he could not have reached the body of his antagonist, but Sercombe's arm would have had at least one terrible gash from his *skean-dhu*, sharp as a razor, had not, at the moment, from the top of the ridge come the stern voice of the chief. Rob's knife, like Excalibur from the hand of Sir Bedivere, "made lightnings in the splendour of the moon," as he threw it from him, and himself down by his father. Then Hector came to himself and rose. Rob rose also; and his father, trembling with excitement, stood grasping his arm, for he saw the stalwart form of his chief on the ridge above them. Alister had been waked by the gun, and at the roar of his friend Hector, sprang from his bed. When

he saw his beloved stag dead on his pasture, he came down the ridge like an avalanche.

Sercombe stood on his defence, wondering what devil was to pay, but beginning to think he might be in some wrong box. He had taken no trouble to understand the boundaries between Mr. Peregrine Palmer's land and that of the chief, and had imagined himself safe on the south side of the big burn.

Alister gazed speechless for a moment on the slaughtered stag, and heaved a great sigh.

"Mr. Sercombe," he said, "I would rather you had shot my best horse! Are you aware, sir, that you are a poacher?"

"I had supposed the appellation inapplicable to a gentleman!" answered Sercombe, with entire coolness. "But by all means take me before a magistrate."

"You are before a magistrate."

"All I have to answer then is, that I should not have shot the animal had I not believed myself within my rights."

"On that point, and on this very ground, I instructed you myself!" said the chief.

"I misunderstood you."

"Say rather you had not the courtesy to heed what I told you—had not faith enough to take the word of a gentleman! And for this my poor stag has suffered!"

He stood for some moments in conflict with himself, then quietly resumed.

"Of course, Mr. Sercombe, I have no intention of pushing the matter!" he said.

"I should hope not!" returned Sercombe scornfully. "I will pay whatever you choose to set on the brute."

It would be hard to say which was less agreeable to the chief—to have his stag called a brute, or be offered blood-money for him.

"Stag Ruadh priced like a bullock!" he said, with a slow smile, full of sadness; "—the pride of every child in the strath! Not a gentleman in the county would have shot Clanruadh's deer!"

Sercombe was by this time feeling uncomfortable, and it made him angry. He muttered something about superstition.

"He was taken when a calf," the chief went on, "and given to a great-aunt of mine. But when he grew up, he took to the hills again, and was known by his silver collar till he managed to rid himself of it. He shall be buried where he lies, and his monument shall tell how the stranger Sasunnach served the stag of Clanruadh!"

"Why the deuce didn't you keep the precious monster in a paddock, and let people know him for a tame animal?" sneered Sercombe.

"My poor Ruadh!" said the chief; "he was no tame animal! He as well as I would have preferred the death you have given him to such a fate. He lived while he lived! I thank you for his immediate transit. Shot right through the heart! Had you maimed him I should have been angrier."

Sercombe felt flattered, and, attributing

the chief's gentleness to a desire to please him, began to condescend.

"Well, come now, Macruadh!" he began; but the chief turned from him.

Hector stood with his arm on Rob's shoulder, and the tears rolling down his cheeks. He would not have wept but that the sobs of his son shook him.

"Rob of the Angels," Alister said in their mother-tongue, "you must make an apology to the Sasunnach gentleman for drawing the knife on him. That was wrong, if he had killed all the deer on Benruadh."

"It was not for that, Macruadh," answered Rob of the Angels. "It was because he struck my father, and laid a better man than himself on the grass."

The chief turned to the Englishman.

"Did the old man strike you, Mr. Sercombe?"

"No, by Jove! I took a little care of that! If he had, I would have broken every bone in his body!"

"Why did you strike him then?"

"Because he rushed at me."

"It was his duty to capture a poacher!—But you did not know he was deaf and dumb!" Alister added, as some excuse.

"The deaf makes no difference!" protested Rob. "Hector of the Stags does not fight with his hands like a woman!"

"Well, what's done is done!" laughed Sercombe. "It wasn't a bad shot anyhow!"

"You have little to plume yourself upon, Mr. Sercombe!" said the chief. "You are a good shot, but you need not have been so frightened at an old man as to knock him down!"

"Come, come, Macruadh! enough's enough! It's time to drop this!" returned Sercombe. "I can't stand much more of it!—Take ten pounds for the head!—Come!"

The chief made one great stride towards him, but turned away, and said,

"Come along, Rob! Tell your father

you must not go up the hill again to-night."

"No, sir," answered Rob; "there's nothing now to go up the hill for! Poor old Ruadh! God rest his soul!"

"Amen!" responded the chief; "but say rather, 'God give him room to run!'"

"Amen! It is better.—But," added Rob, "we must watch by the body. The foxes and hooded crows are gathering already—I hear them on the hills; and I saw a sea-eagle as white as silver yesterday! We cannot leave Ruadh till he is under God's plaid!"

"Then one of you come and fetch food and fire," said the chief. "I will be with you early."

Father and son communicated in silence, and Rob went with the chief.

"They worship the stag, these peasants, as the old Egyptians the bull!" said Sercombe to himself, walking home full of contempt.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STAG'S HEAD.

Alister went straight to his brother's room, his heart bursting with indignation. It was some time before Ian could get the story from him in plain consecution; every other moment he would diverge into fierce denunciations.

"Hadn't you better tell your master what has happened?" at length said Ian. "He ought to know why you curse one of your fellows so bitterly."

Alister was dumb. For a moment he looked aghast.

"Ian!" he said: "You think he wants to be told anything? I always thought you believed in his divinity!"

"Ah!" returned Ian, "but do you? How am I to imagine it, when you go on like that in his hearing? Is it so you acknowledge his presence?"

"Oh, Ian! you don't know how it tortures me to think of that interloper, the low brute, killing the big stag, the Macruadh stag—and on my land too! I feel as if I could tear him in pieces. But for *him* I would have killed him on the spot! It *is* hard if I may not let off my rage even to you!"

"Let it off to *him*, Alister; he will give you fairer play than your small brother; he understands you better than I."

"But I could not let it off to him that way!"

"Then that is not a good way. The justice that, even in imagination, would tear and destroy and avenge, may be justice, but it is devil's justice. Come, begin now, and tell me all quietly—as if you had read it in a book."

"Word for word, then, with all the im-

precations!" returned Alister, a little cooler; and Ian was soon in possession of the story.

"*Now* what do you think, Ian?" said the chief, ending a recital true to the very letter, and in a measure calm, but at various points revealing, by the merest dip of the surface, the boiling of the floods beneath.

"You must send him the head, Alister," answered Ian.

"Send—what—who—I don't understand you, Ian!" returned the chief, bewildered.

"Oh, well, never mind!" said Ian. "You will think of it presently!"

And therewith he turned his face to the wall, as if he would go to sleep.

It had been a thing understood betwixt the brothers, and that from so far back in the golden haze of childhood that the beginning of it was out of sight, that, the moment one of them turned his back, not a word more was to be said, until he who thus dropped the subject, chose to resume it: to break this unspoken compact would have

been to break one of the strands in the ancient bond of their most fast brotherhood. Alister therefore went at once to his room, leaving Ian loving him hard, and praying for him with his face to the wall. He went as one knowing well the storm he was about to encounter, but never before had he had such a storm to meet.

He closed the door, and sat down on the side of his bed like one stunned. He did not doubt, yet could hardly allow he believed, that Ian, his oracle, had in verity told him to send the antlers of his *cabrach mòr*, the late live type of his ancient crest, the pride of Clanruadh, to the vile fellow of a Sasunnach who had sent out into the deep the joyous soul of the fierce, bare mountains.

There were rushings to and fro in the spirit of Alister, wild and terrible, even as those in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. He never closed his eyes, but fought with himself all the night, until the morning broke. Could this thing be indeed his

duty? And if not his duty, was he called to do it from mere bravado of goodness? How frightfully would not such an action be misunderstood by such a man! What could he take it for but a mean currying of favour with him! Why should he move to please such a fellow! Ian was too hard upon him! The more he yielded, the more Ian demanded! Every time it was something harder than the last! And why did he turn his face to the wall? Was he not fit to be argued with! Was he one that would not listen to reason! He had never known Ian ungenerous till now!

But all the time there lay at his door a thing calling out to be done! The thing he did not like was *always* the thing he had to do! he grumbled; but this thing he *hated* doing! It was abominable! What! send the grand head, with its horns spread wide like a half-moon, and leaning like oaks from a precipice—send it to the man that made it a dead thing! Never! It must not be left behind! It must go to

the grave with the fleet limbs! and over it should rise a monument, at sight of which every friendly highlandman would say, *Feuch an cabrach mòr de Clanruadh!* What a mockery of fate to be exposed for ever to the vulgar Cockney gaze, the trophy of a fool, whose boast was to kill! Such a noble beast! Such a mean man! To mutilate his remains for the pride of the wretch who killed him! It was too horrible!

He thought and thought—until at last he lay powerless to think any more. But it is not always the devil that enters in when a man ceases to think. God forbid! The cessation of thought gives opportunity for setting the true soul thinking from another quarter. Suddenly Alister remembered a conversation he had had with Ian a day or two before. He had been saying to Ian that he could not understand what Jesus meant when he said, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also;" and was dissatisfied with the way Ian had

answered him. "You must explain it to yourself," Ian said. He replied, "If I could do that, I should not have to ask you." "There are many things," Ian rejoined, "—arithmetic is one—that can be understood only in the doing of them." "But how can I do a thing without understanding it?" objected Alister. "When you have an opportunity of doing this very thing," said Ian, "do it, and see what will follow!" At the time he thought Ian was refusing to come to the point, and was annoyingly indefinite and illogical; but now it struck him that here was the opportunity of which he had spoken.

"I see!" he said to himself. "It is not want of understanding that is in the way now! A thing cannot look hateful and reasonable at the same moment! This may be just the sort of thing Jesus meant! Even if I be in the right, I have a right to yield my right—and to *him* I will yield it. That was why Ian turned his face to the wall: he wanted me to discover that

here was my opportunity! How but in the name of Jesus Christ could he have dared tell me to forgive Ruadh's death by sending his head to his murderer! It has to be done! I've got to do it! Here is my chance of turning the other cheek and being hurt again! What can come of it is no business of mine! To return evil is just to do a fresh evil! It *may* make the man ashamed of himself! It cannot hurt the stag; it only hurts my pride, and I owe my pride nothing! Why should not the fellow have what satisfaction he may—something to show for his shot! He shall have the head."

Thereupon rushed into his heart the joy of giving up, of deliverance from self; and pity, to leaven his contempt, awoke for Sercombe. No sooner had he yielded his pride, than he felt it possible to love the man—not for anything he was, but for what he might and must be.

"God let the man kill the stag," he said; "I will let him have the head."

Again and yet again swelled afresh the tide of wrath and unwillingness, making him feel as if he could not carry out his resolve; but all the time he knew the thing was as good as done—absolutely determined, so that nothing could turn it aside.

"To yield where one may, is the prerogative of liberty!" he said to himself. "God only can give; who would be his child must yield! Abroad in the fields of air, as Paul and the love of God make me hope, what will the wind-battling Ruadh care for his old head! Would he not say, 'Let the man have it; my hour was come, or the Some One would not have let him kill me!'?"

Thus argued the chief while the darkness endured—and as soon as the morning began to break, rose, took spade and pick and great knife, and went where Hector and Rob were watching the slain.

It was bitterly cold. The burn crept silent under a continuous bridge of ice.

The grass-blades were crisp with frost. The ground was so hard it met iron like iron.

He sent the men to get their breakfast from Nancy: none but himself should do the last offices for Ruadh! With skilful hand he separated and laid aside the head —in sacrifice to the living God. Then the hard earth rang with mighty blows of the pickaxe. The labour was severe, and long ere the grave was deep enough, Hector and Rob had returned; but the chief would not get out of it to give them any share in the work. When he laid hold of the body, they did not offer to help him; they understood the heart of their chief. Not without a last pang that he could not lay the head beside it, he began to shovel in the frozen clods, and then at length allowed them to take a part. When the grave was full, they rolled great stones upon it, that it might not be desecrated. Then the chief went back to his room, and proceeded to prepare the head, that, as the sacrifice, so should be the gift.

"I suppose he would like glass eyes, the ruffian!" he muttered to himself, "but I will not have the mockery. I will fill the sockets and sew up the eyelids, and the face shall be as of one that sleeps."

Having done all, and written certain directions for temporary treatment, which he tied to an ear, he laid the head aside till the evening.

All the day long, not a word concerning it passed between the brothers; but when evening came, Alister, with a blue cotton handkerchief in his hand, hiding the head as far as the roots of the huge horns, asked Ian to go for a walk. They went straight to the New House. Alister left the head at the door, with his compliments to Mr. Sercombe.

As soon as they were out of sight of the house, Ian put his arm through his brother's, but did not speak.

"I know now about turning the other cheek!" said Alister. "—Poor Ruadh!"

"Leave him to the God that made the

great head and nimble feet of him," said Ian. "A God that did not care for what he had made, how should we believe in! but he who cares for the dying sparrow, may be trusted with the dead stag."

"Truly, yes," returned Alister.

"Let us sit down," said Ian, "and I will sing you a song I made last night; I could not sleep after you left me."

Without reply, Alister took a stone by the wayside, and Ian one a couple of yards from him. This was his song.

LOVE'S HISTORY.

Love, the baby,
  Toddled out to pluck a flower;
One said, "No, sir;" one said, "Maybe,
  At the evening hour!"

Love, the boy,
  Joined the boys and girls at play;
But he left them half his joy
  Ere the close of day.

Love, the youth,
  Roamed the country, lightning-laden;
But he hurt himself, and, sooth,
  Many a man and maiden!

Love, the man,
  Sought a service all about;
But he would not take their plan,
  So they cast him out.

Love, the aged,
  Walking, bowed, the shadeless miles,
Read a volume many-paged,
  Full of tears and smiles.

Love, the weary,
  Tottered down the shelving road:
At its foot, lo, night the starry
  Meeting him from God!

"Love, the holy!"
  Sang a music in her dome,
Sang it softly, sang it slowly,
  "—Love is coming home!"

Ere the week was out, there stood above the dead stag a growing cairn, to this day called *Càrn a' cabrach mòr*. It took ten men with levers to roll one of the boulders at its base. Men still cast stones upon it as they pass.

The next morning came a note to the cottage, in which Sercombe thanked the Macruadh for changing his mind, and said

that, although he was indeed glad to have secured such a splendid head, he would certainly have stalked another deer, had he known the chief set such store by the one in question.

It was handed to Alister as he sat at his second breakfast with his mother and Ian: even in winter he was out of the house by six o'clock, to set his men to work, and take his own share. He read to the end of the first page with curling lip; the moment he turned the leaf, he sprang from his seat with an exclamation that startled his mother.

"The hound!—I beg my good dogs' pardon, one and all!" he cried. "—Look at this, Ian! See what comes of taking your advice!"

"My dear fellow, I gave you no advice that had the least regard to the consequence of following it! That was the one thing you had nothing to do with."

"*Read*," insisted Alister, as he pranced about the room. "No, don't read the

letter; it's not worth reading. Look at the paper in it."

Ian looked, and saw a cheque for ten pounds. He burst into loud laughter.

"Poor Ruadh's horns! they're hardly so long as their owner's ears!" he said.

"I told you so!" cried the chief.

"No, Alister! You never suspected such a donkey!"

"What is it all about?" asked the mother.

"The wretch who shot Ruadh," replied Alister, "—to whom I gave his head, all to please Ian,——"

"Alister!" said Ian.

The chief understood, and retracted.

"—no, not to please Ian, but to do what Ian showed me was right:—I believe it was my duty!—I hope it was!—here's the murdering fellow sends me a cheque for ten pounds!—I told you, Ian, he offered me ten pounds over the dead body!"

"I daresay the poor fellow was sorely

puzzled what to do, and appealed to everybody in the house for advice!"

"You take the cheque to represent the combined wisdom of the New House?"

"You must have puzzled them all!" persisted Ian. "How could people with no principle beyond that of keeping to a bargain, understand you otherwise! First, you perform an action such persons think degrading: you carry a fellow's bag for a shilling, and then himself for nothing! Next, in the very fury of indignation with a man for killing the finest stag in the country on your meadow, you carry him home the head with your own hands! It all comes of that unlucky divine motion of yours to do good that good may come! That shilling of Mistress Conal's is at the root of it all!"

Ian laughed again, and right heartily. The chief was too angry to enter into the humour of the thing.

"Upon my word, Ian, it is too bad of you! What *are* you laughing at? It

would become you better to tell me what I am to do! Am I free to break the rascal's bones?"

"Assuredly not, after that affair with the bag!"

"Oh, damn the bag!—I beg your pardon, mother."

"Am I to believe my ears, Alister?"

"What does it matter, mother? What harm can it do the bag? I wished no evil to any creature!"

"It was the more foolish."

"I grant it, mother. But you don't know what a relief it is sometimes to swear a little!—You are quite wrong, Ian; it all comes of giving him the head!"

"You wish you had not given it him?"

"No!" growled Alister, as from a pent volcano.

"You will break my ears, Alister!" cried the mother, unable to keep from laughing at the wrath in which he went straining through the room.

"Think of it," insisted Ian: "a man like

him could not think otherwise without a revolution of his whole being to which the change of the leopard's spots would be nothing.—What you meant, after all, was not cordiality; it was only generosity; to which his response, his countercheck friendly, was an order for ten pounds!—All is right between you!"

"Now, really, Ian, you must not go on teasing your elder brother so!" said the mother.

Alister laughed, and ceased fuming.

"But I must answer the brute!" he said. "What am I to say to him?"

"That you are much obliged," replied Ian, "and will have the cheque framed and hung in the hall."

"Come, come! no more of that!"

"Well, then, let me answer the letter."

"That is just what I wanted!"

Ian sat down at his mother's table, and this is what he wrote.

"Dear sir,—My brother desires me to return the cheque which you unhappily

thought it right to send him. Humanity is subject to mistake, but I am sorry for the individual who could so misunderstand his courtesy. I have the honour to remain, sir, your obedient servant, Ian Macruadh."

As Ian guessed, the matter had been openly discussed at the New House; and the money was sent with the approval of all except the two young ladies. They had seen the young men in circumstances more favourable to the understanding of them by ordinary people.

"Why didn't the chief write himself?" said Christian.

"Oh," replied Sercombe, "his little brother had been to school, and could write better!"

Christina and Mercy exchanged glances.

"I will tell you," Mercy said, "why Mr. Ian answered the note: the chief had done with you!"

"Or," suggested Christina, "the chief was in such a rage that he would write nothing but a challenge."

"I wish to goodness he had! It would have given me the chance of giving the clodhopper a lesson."

"For sending you the finest stag's head and horns in the country!" remarked Mercy.

"I shot the stag! Perhaps you don't believe I shot him!"

"Indeed I do! No one else would have done it. The chief would have died sooner!"

"I'm sick of your chief!" said Christian. "A pretty chief without a penny to bless himself! A chief, and glad of the job of carrying a carpet-bag! You'll be calling him *my lord*, next!"

"He may at least write *Baronet* after his name when he pleases," returned Mercy.

"Why don't he then? A likely story!"

"Because," answered Christina, "both his father and himself were ashamed of how the first baronet got his title. It had to do with the sale of a part of the property, and they counted the land the clan's as well as the chief's. They regarded it as an act of

treachery to put the clan in the power of a stranger, and the chief looks on the title as a brand of shame."

"I don't question the treachery," said Christian. "A highlander is treacherous."

Christina had asked a friend in Glasgow to find out for her anything known among the lawyers concerning the Macruadhs, and what she had just recounted was a part of the information she had thereby received.

Thenceforward silence covered the whole transaction. Sercombe neither returned the head, sent an apology, nor recognized the gift. That he had shot the stag was enough!

But these things wrought shaping the idea of the brothers in the minds of the sisters, and they were beginning to feel a strange confidence in them, such as they had never had in men before. A curious little halo began to shimmer about the heads of the young men in the picture-gallery of the girls' fancy. Not the less, however, did they regard them as enthus-

iasts, unfitted to this world, incapable of self-protection, too good to live—in a word, unpractical! Because a man would live according to the laws of his being as well as of his body, obeying simple, imperative, essential human necessity, his fellows forsooth call him *unpractical!* Of the idiotic delusions of the children of this world, that of being practical is one of the most ludicrous.

Here is a translation, made by Ian, of one of Alister's Gaelic songs.

THE SUN'S DAUGHTER.

A bright drop of water
  In the gold tire
Of a sun's daughter
  Was laughing to her sire;

And from all the flowers about,
  That never toiled or spun,
The soul of each looked out,
  Clear laughing to the sun.

I saw them unfolding
  Their hearts every one!
Every soul holding
  Within it the sun!

But all the sun-mirrors
Vanished anon;
And their flowers, mere starers,
Grew dry in the sun.

"My soul is but water,
Shining and gone!
She is but the daughter,"
I said, "of the sun!"

My soul sat her down
In a deep-shaded gloom;
Her glory was flown,
Her earth was a tomb,

Till night came and caught her,
And then out she shone;
And I knew her no daughter
Of that shining sun—

Till night came down and taught her
Of a glory yet unknown;
And I knew my soul the daughter
Of a sun behind the sun.

Back, back to him that wrought her
My soul shall haste and run;
Straight back to him, his daughter,
To the sun behind the sun.

CHAPTER IX.

ANNIE OF THE SHOP.

At the dance in the chief's barn, Sercombe had paired with Annie of the shop oftener than with any other of the girls. That she should please him at all, was something in his favour, for she was a simple, modest girl, with the nicest feeling of the laws of intercourse, the keenest perception both of what is in itself right, and what is becoming in the commonest relation. She understood by a fine moral instinct what respect was due to her, and what respect she ought to show, and was therefore in the truest sense well-bred. There are women whom no change of circumstances would cause to alter even their manners a hair's-breadth:

such are God's ladies; there are others in whom any outward change will reveal the vulgarity of a nature more conscious of claim than of obligation.

I need not say that Sercombe, though a man of what is called education, was but conventionally a gentleman. If in doubt whether a man be a gentleman or not, hear him speak to a woman he regards as his inferior: his very tone will probably betray him. A true gentleman, that is a true man, will be the more carefully respectful. Sercombe was one of those who regard themselves as respectable because they are prudent; whether they are human, and their brother and sister's keeper, they have never asked themselves.

To some minds neither innocent nor simple, there is yet something attractive in innocence and simplicity. Perhaps it gives them a pleasing sense of their superiority—a background against which to rejoice in their liberty, while their pleasure in it helps to obscure the gulf between what the man

would fain hold himself to be, and what in reality he is. There is no spectre so terrible as the unsuspected spectre of a man's own self; it is noisome enough to the man who is ever trying to better it: what must it appear to the man who sees it for the first time! Sercombe's self was ugly, and he did not know it; he thought himself an exceptionally fine fellow. No one knows what a poor creature he is but the man who makes it his business to be true. The only mistake worse than thinking well of himself, is for a man to think God takes no interest in him.

One evening, sorely in lack of amusement, Sercombe wandered out into a star-lit night, and along the road to the village. There he went into the general shop, where sat Annie behind the counter. Now the first attention he almost always paid a woman, that is when he cared and dared, was a compliment—the fungus of an empty head or a false heart; but with Annie he took no such initiative liberty, and she, accustomed to

respectful familiarity from the chief and his brother, showed no repugnance to his friendly approach.

"Upon my word, Miss Annie," said Sercombe, venturing at length a little, "you were the best dancer on the floor that night!"

"Oh, Mr. Sercombe! how can you say so—with such dancers as the young ladies of your party!" returned Annie.

"They dance well," he returned, "but not so well as you."

"It all depends on the dance—whether you are used to it or not."

"No, by Jove! If you had a lesson or two such as they have been having all their lives, you would dance out of their sight in the twinkling of an eye. If I had you for a partner every night for a month, you would dance better than any woman I have ever seen—off the stage—any lady, that is."

The grosser the flattery, the surer with a country girl, he thought. But there was that in his tone, besides the freedom of

sounding her praises in her own ears, which was unpleasing to Annie's ladyhood, and she held her peace.

"Come out and have a turn," he said thereupon. "It is lovely star-light. Have you had a walk to-day?"

"No, I have not," answered Annie, casting how to get rid of him.

"You wrong your beauty by keeping to the house."

"My beauty," said Annie, flushing, "may look after itself; I have nothing to do with it—neither, excuse me, sir, have you."

"Why, who has a right to be offended with the truth! A man can't help seeing your face is as sweet as your voice, and your figure, as revealed by your dancing, a match for the two!"

"I will call my mother," said Annie, and left the shop.

Sercombe did not believe she would, and waited. He took her departure for a mere coquetry. But when a rather grim, handsome old woman appeared, asking him—it

took the most of her English—"What would you be wanting, sir?" as if he had just come into the shop, he found himself awkwardly situated. He answered, with more than his usual politeness, that, having had the pleasure of dancing with her daughter at the chief's ball, he had taken the liberty of looking in to inquire after her health; whereupon, perplexed, the old woman in her turn called Annie, who came at once, but kept close to her mother. Sercombe began to tell them about a tour he had made in Canada, for he had heard they had friends there; but the mother did not understand him, and Annie more and more disliked him. He soon saw that at least he had better say nothing more about a walk, and took himself off, not a little piqued at repulse from a peasant-girl in the most miserable shop he had ever entered.

Two days after, he went again—this time to buy tobacco. Annie was short with him, but he went yet again and yet sooner: these primitive people objected to strangers, he

said; accustomed to him she would be friendly! he would not rest until he had gained some footing of favour with her! Annie grew heartily offended with the man. She also feared what might be said if he kept coming to the shop—where Mistress Conal had seen him more than once, and looked poison at him. For her own sake, for the sake of Lachlan, and for the sake of the chief, she resolved to make the young father of the ancient clan acquainted with her trouble. It was on the day after his rejection of the ten-pound note that she found her opportunity, for the chief came to see her.

"Was he rude to you, Annie?" he asked.

"No, sir—too polite, I think: he must have seen I did not want his company.—I shall feel happier now you know."

"I will see to it," said the chief.

"I hope it will not put you to any trouble, sir!"

"What am I here for, Annie! Are you not my clanswoman! Is not Lachlan my

foster-brother!—He will trouble you no more, I think."

As Alister walked home, he met Sercombe, and after a greeting not very cordial on either side, said thus:

"I should be obliged to you, Mr. Sercombe, if you would send for anything you want, instead of going to the shop yourself. Annie Macruadh is not the sort of girl you may have found in such a position, and you would not wish to make her uncomfortable!"

Sercombe was ashamed, I think; for the refuge of the fool when dissatisfied with himself, is offence with his neighbour, and Sercombe was angry.

"Are you her father—or her lover?" he said.

"She has a right to my protection—and claims it," rejoined Alister quietly.

"Protection! Oh!—What the devil would you protect her from?"

"From you, Mr. Sercombe."

"Protect her, then."

"I will. Force yourself on that young woman's notice again, and you will have to do with me."

They parted. Alister went home. Sercombe went straight to the shop.

He was doing what he could to recommend himself to Christina; but whether from something antagonistic between them, or from unwillingness on her part to yield her position of advantage and so her liberty, she had not given him the encouragement he thought he deserved. He believed himself in love with her, and had told her so; but the truest love such a man can feel, is a poor thing. He admired, and desired, and thought he loved her beauty, and that he called being in love with *her!* He did not think much about her money, but had she then been brought to poverty, he would at least have hesitated about marrying her.

In the family he was regarded as her affianced, although she did not treat him as such, but merely went on bewitching

him, pleased that at least he was a man of the world.

While one is yet only *in love*, the real person, the love-capable, lies covered with the rose-leaves of a thousand sleepy-eyed dreams, and through them come to the dreamer but the barest hints of the real person of whom is the dream. A thousand fancies fly out, approach, and cross, but never meet; the man and the woman are pleased, not with each other, but each with the fancied other. The merest common likings are taken for signs of a wonderful sympathy, of a radical unity—of essential capacity, therefore, of loving and being loved; at a hundred points their souls seem to touch, but their contacts are the merest brushings as of insect-antennæ; the real man, the real woman, is all the time asleep under the rose-leaves. Happy is the rare fate of the true—to wake and come forth and meet in the majesty of the truth, in the image of God, in their very being, in the power of that love which alone is

being. They love, not this and that about each other, but each the very other—a love as essential to reality, to truth, to religion, as the love of the very God. Where such love is, let the differences of taste, the unfitnesses of temperament be what they may, the two must by and by be thoroughly one.

Sercombe saw no reason why a gentleman should not amuse himself with any young woman he pleased. What was the chief to him! He was not his chief! If he was a big man in the eyes of his little clan, he was nothing much in the eyes of Hilary Sercombe.

CHAPTER X.

THE ENCOUNTER.

Annie came again to her chief, with the complaint that Mr. Sercombe persisted in his attentions. Alister went to see her home. They had not gone far when Sercombe overtook them, and passed. The chief told Annie to go on, and called after him,

"I must have a word or two with you, Mr. Sercombe!"

He turned and came up with long steps, his hands in his coat-pockets.

"I warned you to leave that girl alone!" said the chief.

"And I warn you now," rejoined Sercombe, "to leave me alone!"

"I am bound to take care of her."

"And I of myself."

"Not at her expense!"

"At yours then!" answered Sercombe, provoking an encounter, to which he was the more inclined that he saw Ian coming slowly up the ridge.

"It was your deliberate intention then to forget the caution I gave you?" said the chief, restraining his anger.

"I make a point of forgetting what I do not think worth remembering."

"I forget nothing!"

"I congratulate you."

"And I mean to assist your memory, Mr. Sercombe."

"Mr. Macruadh!" returned Sercombe, "if you expect me not to open my lips to any hussy in the glen without your leave, ——"

His speech was cut short by a box on the ear from the open hand of the chief. He would not use his fist without warning, but such a word applied to any honest

woman of his clan demanded instant recognition.

Sercombe fell back a step, white with rage, then darting forward, struck straight at the front of his adversary. Alister avoided the blow, but soon found himself a mere child at such play with the Englishman. He had not again touched Sercombe, and was himself bleeding fast, when Ian came up running.

"Damn you! come on!" cried Sercombe when he saw him; "I can do the precious pair of you!"

"Stop!" cried Ian, laying hold of his brother from behind, pinning his arms to his sides, wheeling him round, and taking his place. "Give over, Alister," he went on. "You can't do it, and I won't see you punished when it is he that deserves it. Go and sit there, and look on."

"*You* can't do it, Ian!" returned Alister. "It is my business. One blow in will serve. He jumps about like a goat that I can't hit him!"

"You are blind with blood!" said Ian, in a tone that gave Sercombe expectation of too easy a victory. "Sit down there, I tell you!"

"Mind, I don't give in!" said Alister, but turning went to the bank at the road-side. "If he speak once again to Annie, I swear I will make him repent it!"

Sercombe laughed insultingly.

"Mr. Sercombe," said Ian, "had we not better put off our bout till to-morrow? You have fought already!"

"Damn you for a coward, come on!"

"Would you not like to take your breath for a moment?"

"I have all I am likely to need."

"It is only fair," persisted Ian, "to warn you that you will not find my knowledge on the level of my brother's!"

"Shut up," said Sercombe savagely, "and come on."

For a few rounds Ian seemed to Alister to be giving Sercombe time to recover his wind; to Sercombe he seemed to be saving

his own. He stood to defend, and did not attempt to put in a blow.

"Mr. Sercombe," he said at length, "you cannot serve me as you did my brother."

"I see that well enough. Come on!"

"Will you give your word to leave Annie of the shop alone?"

Sercombe answered with a scornful imprecation.

"I warn you again, I am no novice in this business!" said Ian.

Sercombe struck out, but did not reach his antagonist.

The fight lasted but a moment longer. As his adversary drew back from a failed blow, Alister saw Ian's eyes flash, and his left arm shoot out, as it seemed, to twice its length. Sercombe neither reeled nor staggered but fell supine, and lay motionless. The brothers were by his side in a moment.

"I struck too hard!" said Ian.

"Who can think about that in a fight!" returned Alister.

"I could have helped it well enough, and a better man would. Something shot through me—I hope it wasn't hatred; I am sure it was anger — and the man went down! What if the devil struck the blow!"

"Nonsense, Ian!" said Alister, as they raised Sercombe to carry him to the cottage. "It was pure indignation, and nothing to blame in it!"

"I wish I could be sure of that!"

They had not gone far before he began to come to himself.

"What are you about?" he said feebly but angrily. "Set me down."

They did so. He staggered to the road-side, and leaned against the bank.

"What's been the row?" he asked. "Oh, I remember!—Well, you've had the best of it!"

He held out his hand in a vague sort of way, and the gesture invaded their soft hearts. Each took the hand.

"I was all right about the girl though,"

said Sercombe. "I didn't mean her any harm."

"I don't think you did," answered Alister; "and I am sure you could have done her none; but the girl did not like it."

"There is not a girl of the clan, or in the neighbourhood, for whom my brother would not have done the same," said Ian.

"You're a brace of woodcocks!" cried Sercombe. "It's well you're not out in the world. You would be in hot water from morning to night! I can't think how the devil you get on at all!"

"Get on! Where?" asked Ian with a smile.

"Come now! You ain't such fools as you want to look! A man must make a place for himself somehow in the world!"

He rose, and they walked in the direction of the cottage.

"There is a better thing than that," said Ian!

"What?"

"To get clean out of it."

"What! cut your throats?"

"I meant that to get out of the world clean was better than to get on in it."

"I don't understand you. I don't choose to think the man that thrashed me a downright idiot!" growled Sercombe.

"What you call getting on," rejoined Ian, "we count not worth a thought. Look at our clan! it is a type of the world itself. Everything is passing away. We believe in the kingdom of heaven."

"Come, come! fellows like you must know well enough that's all bosh! Nobody nowadays—nobody with any brains—believes such rot!"

"We believe in Jesus Christ," said Ian, "and are determined to do what he will have us do, and take our orders from nobody else."

"I don't understand you!"

"I know you don't. You cannot until you set about changing your whole way of life."

"Oh, be damned! what an idea! a sneaking, impossible idea!"

"As to its being an impossible idea, we hold it, and live by it. How absurd it must seem to you, I know perfectly. But we don't live in your world, and you do not even see the lights of ours."

"'There is a world beyond the stars'!—Well, there may be; I know nothing about it; I only know there is one on this side of them,—a very decent sort of world too! I mean to make the best of it."

"And have not begun yet!"

"Indeed I have! I deny myself nothing. I live as I was made to live."

"If you were not made to obey your conscience or despise yourself, you are differently made from us, and no communication is possible between us. We must wait until what differences a man from a beast make its appearance in you."

"You are polite!"

"You have spoken of us as you think;

now we speak of you as we think. Taking your representation of yourself, you are in the condition of the lower animals, for you claim inclination as the law of your life."

"My beast is better than your man!"

"You mean you get more of the good of life!"

"Right! I do."

The brothers exchanged a look and smile.

"But suppose," resumed Ian, "the man we have found in us should one day wake up in you! Suppose he should say, 'Why did you make a beast of me?'! It will not be easy for you to answer him!"

"That's all moonshine! Things are as you take them."

"So said Lady Macbeth till she took to walking in her sleep, and couldn't get rid of the smell of the blood!"

Sercombe said no more. He was silent with disgust at the nonsense of it all.

They reached the door of the cottage.

Alister invited him to walk in. He drew back, and would have excused himself.

"You had better lie down a while," said Alister.

"You shall come to my room," said Ian. "We shall meet nobody."

Sercombe yielded, for he felt queer. He threw himself on Ian's bed, and in a few minutes was fast asleep.

When he woke, he had a cup of tea, and went away little the worse. The laird could not show himself for several days.

After this Annie had no further molestation. But indeed the young men's time was almost up—which was quite as well, for Annie of the shop, after turning a corner of the road, had climbed the hill-side, and seen all that passed. The young ladies, hearing contradictory statements, called upon Annie to learn the truth, and the intercourse with her that followed was not without influence on them. Through Annie they saw further into the character of the brothers, who, if they

advocated things too fine for the world the girls had hitherto known, *did* things also of which it would by no means have approved. They valued that world and its judgment not a straw!

CHAPTER XI.

A LESSON.

All the gentlemen at the New House left it together, and its ladies were once more abandoned to the society of Nature, who said little to any of them. For, though she recognized her grandchildren, and did what she could for them, it was now time they should make some move towards acquaintance with her. A point comes when she must stand upon her dignity, for it is great. If you would hear her wonderful tales, or see her marvellous treasures, you must not trifle with her; you must not talk as if you could rummage her drawers and cabinets as you pleased. You must believe in her; you must reverence her; else, although she is

everywhere about the house, you may not meet her from the beginning of one year to the end of another.

To allude to any aspect of nature in the presence of the girls was to threaten to bore them; and I heartily confess to being bored myself with common talk about *scenery;* but these ladies appeared unaware of the least expression on the face of their grandmother. Doubtless they received some good from the aspect of things — that they could not help; there Grannie's hidden, and therefore irresistible power was in operation; but the moment they had their thoughts directed to the world around them, they began to gape inwardly. Even the trumpet and shawm of her winds, the stately march of her clouds, and the torrent-rush of her waters, were to them poor facts, no vaguest embodiment of truths eternal. It was small wonder then that verse of any worth should be to them but sounding brass and clanging cymbals. What they called *society*, its ways and judgments, its

decrees and condemnations, its fashions and pomps and shows, false, unjust, ugly, was nearly all they cared for. The truth of things, without care for which man or woman is the merest puppet, had hitherto been nothing to them. To talk of Nature was sentimental. To talk of God was both irreverent and ill-bred. Wordsworth was an old woman; St. Paul an evangelical churchman. They saw no feature of any truth, but, like all unthinkers, wrapped the words of it in their own foolishness, and then sneered at them. They were too much of ladies, however, to do it disagreeably; they only smiled at the foolish neighbour who believed things they were too sensible to believe. It must, however, be said for them, that they had not yet refused anything worth believing—*as presented to them.* They had not yet actually looked upon any truth and refused it. They were indeed not yet true enough in themselves to suspect the presence of either a truth or a falsehood.

A thaw came, and the ways were bad, and they found the time hang yet heavier on their unaided hands. An intercourse by degrees established itself between Mrs. Macruadh and the well-meaning, handsome, smiling Mrs. Palmer, and rendered it natural for the girls to go rather frequently to the cottage. They made themselves agreeable to the mother, and subject to the law of her presence showed to better advantage.

With their love of literature, it was natural also that the young men should at such times not only talk about books, but occasionally read for their entertainment from some favourite one; so that now, for the first time in their lives, the young ladies were brought under direct teaching of a worthy sort—they had had but a mockery of it at school and church—and a little light began to soak through their unseeking eyes. Among many others, however, less manifest, one obstruction to their progress lay in the fact that Christina, whose percep-

tion in some directions was quick enough, would always make a dart at the comical side of anything that could be comically turned, so disturbing upon occasion the whole spiritual atmosphere about some delicate epiphany: this to both Alister and Ian was unbearable. She offended chiefly in respect of Wordsworth—who had not humour enough always to perceive what seriously meant expression might suggest a ludicrous idea.

One time, reading from the Excursion, Ian came to the verse—not to be found, I think, in later editions—

"Perhaps it is not he but some one else":—

"Awful idea!" exclaimed Christina, with sepulchral tone; "—'some one else!' Think of it! It makes me shudder! *Who* might it not have been!"

Ian closed the book, and persistently refused to read more that day.

Another time he was reading, in illustration of something, Wordsworth's poem,

"To a Skylark," the earlier of the two with that title: when he came to the unfortunate line,—

"Happy, happy liver!"—

"Oh, I am glad to know that!" cried Christina. "I always thought the poor lark must have a bad digestion—he was up so early!"

Ian refused to finish the poem, although Mercy begged hard.

The next time they came, he proposed to "read something in Miss Palmer's style," and taking up a volume of Hood, and avoiding both his serious and the best of his comic poems, turned to two or three of the worst he could find. After these he read a vulgar rime about an execution, pretending to be largely amused, making flat jokes of his own, and sometimes explaining elaborately where was no occasion.

"Ian!" said his mother at length; "have you bid farewell to your senses?"

"No, mother," he answered; "what I

am doing is the merest consequence of the way you brought us up."

"I don't understand that!" she returned.

"You always taught us to do the best we could for our visitors. So when I fail to interest them, I try to amuse them."

"But you need not make a fool of yourself!"

"It is better to make a fool of myself, than let Miss Palmer make a fool of—a great man!"

"Mr. Ian," said Christina, "it is not of yourself but of me you have been making a fool.—I deserved it!" she added, and burst into tears.

"Miss Palmer," said Ian, "I will drop my foolishness, if you will drop your fun."

"I will," answered Christina.

And Ian read them the poem beginning—

"Three years she grew in sun and shower."

Scoffing at what is beautiful, is not necessarily a sign of evil; it may only indicate stupidity or undevelopment: the beauty is

not perceived. But blame is often present in prolonged undevelopment. Surely no one habitually obeying his conscience would long be left without a visit from some shape of the beautiful!

CHAPTER XII.

NATURE.

The girls had every liberty; their mother seldom interfered. Herself true to her own dim horn-lantern, she had confidence in the discretion of her daughters, and looked for no more than discretion. Hence an amount of intercourse was possible between them and the young men, which must have speedily grown to a genuine intimacy had they inhabited even a neighbouring sphere of conscious life.

Almost unknown to herself, however, a change for the better had begun in Mercy. She had not yet laid hold of, had not yet perceived any truth; but she had some sense of the blank where truth ought to be. It

was not a sense that truth was lacking; it was only a sense that something was not in her which was in those men. A nature such as hers, one that had not yet sinned against the truth, was not one long to frequent such a warm atmosphere of live truth, without approach to the hour when it must chip its shell, open its eyes, and acknowledge a world of duty around it.

One lovely star-lit night of keen frost, the two mothers were sitting by a red peat-fire in the little drawing-room of the cottage, and Ian was talking to the girls over some sketches he had made in the north, when the chief came in, bringing with him an air of sharp exhilaration, and proposed a walk.

"Come and have a taste of star-light!" he said.

The girls rose at once, and were ready in a minute.

The chief was walking between the two ladies, and Ian was a few steps in front, his head bent as in thought. Suddenly, Mercy saw him spread out his arms toward the

starry vault, with his face to its serrated edge of mountain-tops. The feeling, almost the sense of another presence awoke in her, and as quickly vanished. The thought, *Is he a pantheist?* took its place. Had she not surprised him in an act of worship? In that wide outspreading of the lifted arms, was he not worshipping the whole, the Pan? Sky and stars and mountains and sea were his God! She walked aghast, forgetful of a hundred things she had heard him say that might have settled the point. She had, during the last day or two, been reading an article in which *pantheism* was once and again referred to with more horror than definiteness. Recovering herself a little, she ventured approach to the subject.

"Macruadh," she said, "Mr. Ian and you often say things about *nature* that I cannot understand: I wish you would tell me what you mean by it."

"By what?" asked Alister.

"By *nature*," answered Mercy. "I

heard Mr. Ian say, for instance, the other night, that he did not like Nature to take liberties with him; you said she might take what liberties with you she pleased; and then you went on talking so that I could not understand a word either of you said!"

While she spoke, Ian had turned and rejoined them, and they were now walking in a line, Mercy between the two men, and Christina on Ian's right. The brothers looked at each other: it would be hard to make her understand just that example! Something more rudimentary must prepare the way! Silence fell for a moment, and then Ian said—

"We mean by *nature* every visitation of the outside world through our senses."

"More plainly, please Mr. Ian! You cannot imagine how stupid I feel when you are talking your *thinks*, as once I heard a child call them."

"I mean by *nature*, then, all that you see and hear and smell and taste and feel of the things round about you."

"If that be all you mean, why should you make it seem so difficult?"

"But that is not all. We mean the things themselves only for the sake of what they say to us. As our sense of smell brings us news of fields far off, so those fields, or even the smell only that comes from them, tell us of things, meanings, thoughts, intentions beyond them, and embodied in them."

"And that is why you speak of Nature as a person?" asked Mercy.

"Whatever influences us must be a person. But God is the only real person, being in himself, and without help from anybody; and so we talk even of the world which is but his living garment, as if that were a person; and we call it *she* as if it were a woman, because so many of God's loveliest influences come to us through her. She always seems to me a beautiful old grandmother."

"But there now! when you talk of her influences, and the liberties she takes, I do

not know what you mean. She seems to do and be something to you which certainly she does not and is not to me. I cannot tell what to make of it. I feel just as when our music-master was talking away about thorough bass: I could not get hold, head or tail, of what the man was after, and we all agreed there was no sense in it. Now I begin to suspect there must have been too much!"

"There is no fear of her!" said Ian to himself.

"My heart told me the truth about her!" thought Alister jubilant. "Now we shall have talk!"

"I think I can let you see into it, Miss Mercy," said Ian. "Imagine for a moment how it would be if, instead of having a roof like 'this most excellent canopy the air, this brave o'erhanging, this majestical roof, fretted with golden fire,'——"

"Are you making the words, or saying them out of a book?" interrupted Mercy.

"Ah! you don't know Hamlet? How

rich I should feel myself if I had the first reading of it before me like you!—But imagine how different it would have been if, instead of such a roof, we had only clouds, hanging always down, like the flies in a theatre, within a yard or two of our heads!"

Mercy was silent for a moment, then said,

"It would be horribly wearisome."

"It would indeed be wearisome! But how do you think it would affect your nature, your being?"

Mercy held the peace which is the ignorant man's wisdom.

"We should have known nothing of astronomy," said Christina.

"True; and the worst would have been, that the soul would have had no astronomy —no notion of heavenly things."

"There you leave me out again!" said Mercy.

"I mean," said Ian, "that it would have had no sense of outstretching, endless space,

no feeling of heights above, and depths beneath. The idea of space would not have come awake in it."

"I understand!" said Christina. "But I do not see that we should have been much the worse off. Why should we have the idea of more than we want? So long as we have room, I do not see what space matters to us!"

"Ah, but when the soul wakes up, it needs all space for room! A limit of thousands of worlds will not content it. Mere elbow-room will not do when the soul wakes up!"

"Then my soul is not waked up yet!" rejoined Christina with a laugh.

Ian did not reply, and Christina felt that he accepted the proposition, absurd as it seemed to herself.

"But there is far more than that," he resumed. "What notion could you have had of majesty, if the heavens seemed scarce higher than the earth? what feeling of the grandeur of him we call God, of his illimit-

ation in goodness? For space is the body to the idea of liberty. Liberty is—God and the souls that love; these are the limitless room, the space, in which thoughts, the souls of things, have their being. If there were no holy mind, then no freedom, no spiritual space, therefore no thoughts; just as, if there were no space, there could be no things."

Ian saw that not even Alister was following him, and changed his key.

"Look up," he said, "and tell me what you see.—What is the shape over us?"

"It is a vault," replied Christina.

"A dome—is it not?" said Mercy.

"Yes; a vault or a dome, recognizable at the moment mainly by its shining points. This dome we understand to be the complement or completing part of a correspondent dome on the other side of the world. It follows that we are in the heart of a hollow sphere of loveliest blue, spangled with light. Now the sphere is the one perfect geometrical form. Over and round us then we have the one perfect shape. I do not

say it is put there for the purpose of representing God; I say it is there of necessity, because of its nature, and its nature is its relation to God. It is of God's thinking; and that half-sphere above men's heads, with influence endlessly beyond the reach of their consciousness, is the beginning of all revelation of him to men. They must begin with that. It is the simplest as well as most external likeness of him, while its relation to him goes so deep that it represents things in his very nature that nothing else could."

"You bewilder me," said Mercy. "I cannot follow you. I am not fit for such high things!"

"I will go on; you will soon begin to see what I mean: I know what you are fit for better than you do yourself, Miss Mercy. —Think then how it would be if this blue sky were plainly a solid. Men of old believed it a succession of hollow spheres, one outside the other; it is hardly a wonder they should have had little gods. No

matter how high the vault of the inclosing sphere; limited at all it could not declare the glory of God, it could only show his handiwork. In our day it is a sphere only to the eyes; it is a foreshortening of infinitude that it may enter our sight; there is no imagining of a limit to it; it is a sphere only in this, that in no one direction can we come nearer to its circumference than in another. This infinitive sphere, I say then, or, if you like it better, this spheric infinitude, is the only figure, image, emblem, symbol, fit to begin us to know God; it is an idea incomprehensible; we can only believe in it. In like manner God cannot by searching be found out, cannot be grasped by any mind, yet is ever before us, the one we can best know, the one we must know, the one we cannot help knowing; for his end in giving us being is that his humblest creature should at length possess himself, and be possessed by him."

"I think I begin," said Mercy—and said no more.

"If it were not for the outside world," resumed Ian, "we should have no inside world to understand things by. Least of all could we understand God without these millions of sights and sounds and scents and motions, weaving their endless harmonies. They come out from his heart to let us know a little of what is in it!"

Alister had been listening hard. He could not originate such things, but he could understand them; and his delight in them proved them his own, although his brother had sunk the shaft that laid open their lode.

"I never heard you put a thing better, Ian!" he said.

"You gentlemen," said Mercy, "seem to have a place to think in that I don't know how to get into! Could you not open your church-door a little wider to let me in? There must be room for more than two!"

She was looking up at Alister, not so much afraid of him; Ian was to her hardly of this world. In her eyes Alister saw

something that seemed to reflect the starlight; but it might have been a luminous haze about the waking stars of her soul!

"My brother has always been janitor to me," replied Alister; "I do not know how to open any door. But here no door needs to be opened; you have just to step straight into the temple of nature, among all the good people worshipping."

"There! that is what I was afraid of!" cried Mercy: "you are pantheists!"

"Bless my soul, Mercy!" exclaimed Christina; "what do you mean?"

"Yes," answered Ian. "If to believe that not a lily can grow, not a sparrow fall to the ground without our Father, be pantheism, Alister and I are pantheists. If by pantheism you mean anything that would not fit with that, we are not pantheists."

"Why should we trouble about religion more than is required of us!" interposed Christina.

"Why indeed?" returned Ian. "But then how much is required?"

"You require far more than my father, and he is good enough for me!"

"The Master says we are to love God with all our hearts and souls and strength and mind."

"That was in the old law, Ian," said Alister.

"You are right. Jesus only justified it—and did it."

"How then can you worship in the temple of Nature?" said Mercy.

"Just as he did. It is Nature's temple, mind, for the worship of God, not of herself!"

"But how am I to get into it? That is what I want to know."

"The innermost places of the temple are open only to such as already worship in a greater temple; but it has courts into which any honest soul may enter."

"You wouldn't set me to study Wordsworth?"

"By no means."

"I am glad of that—though there must

be more in him than I see, or you couldn't care for him so much!"

"Some of Nature's lessons you must learn before you can understand them."

"Can you call it learning a lesson if you do not understand it?"

"Yes—to a certain extent. Did you learn at school to work the rule of three?"

"Yes; and I was rather fond of it."

"Did you understand it?"

"I could work sums in it."

"Did you see how it was that setting the terms down so, and working out the rule, must give you a true answer. Did you perceive that it was safe to buy or sell, to build a house, or lay out a garden, by the rule of three?"

"I did not. I do not yet."

"Then one may so far learn a lesson without understanding it! All do, more or less, in Dame Nature's school. Not a few lessons must be so learned in order to be better learned. Without being so learned first, it is not possible to understand them;

the scholar has not facts enough about the things to understand them. Keats's youthful delight in Nature was more intense even than Wordsworth's, but he was only beginning to understand her when he died. Shelley was much nearer understanding her than Keats, but he was drowned before he did understand her. Wordsworth was far before either of them. At the same time, presumptuous as it may appear, I believe there are regions to be traversed, beyond any point to which Wordsworth leads us."

"But how am I to begin? Do tell me. Nothing you say helps me in the least."

"I have all the time been leading you toward the door at which you want to go in. It is not likely, however, that it will open to you at once. I doubt if it will open to you at all except through sorrow."

"You are a most encouraging master!" said Christina, with a light laugh.

"It was Wordsworth's bitter disappoint-

ment in the outcome of the French revolution," continued Ian, "that opened the door to him. Yet he had gone through the outer courts of the temple with more understanding than any who immediately preceded him.—Will you let me ask you a question?"

"You frighten me!" said Mercy.

"I am sorry for that. We will talk of something else."

"I am not afraid of what you may ask me; I am frightened at what you tell me. I fear to go on if I must meet Sorrow on the way!"

"You make one think of some terrible secret society!" said Christina.

"Tell me then, Miss Mercy, is there anything you love very much? I don't say any *person*, but any *thing*."

"I love some animals."

"An animal is not a thing. It is possible to love animals and not the nature of which we are speaking. You might love a dog dearly, and never care to see the sun rise!—

Tell me, did any flower ever make you cry?"

"No," answered Mercy, with a puzzled laugh; "how could it?"

"Did any flower ever make you a moment later in going to bed, or a moment earlier in getting out of it?"

"No, certainly!"

"In that direction, then, I am foiled!

"You would not really have me cry over a flower, Mr. Ian? Did ever a flower make you cry yourself? Of course not! it is only silly women that cry for nothing!"

"I would rather not bring myself in at present," answered Ian smiling. "Do you know how Chaucer felt about flowers?"

"I never read a word of Chaucer."

"Shall I give you an instance?"

"Please."

"Chaucer was a man of the world, a courtier, more or less a man of affairs, employed by Edward III. in foreign business of state: you cannot mistake him for an effeminate or sentimental man! He

does not anywhere, so far as I remember, say that ever he cried over a flower, but he shows a delight in some flowers so delicate and deep that it must have a source profounder than that of most people's tears. When we go back I will read you what he says about the daisy; but one more general passage I think I could repeat. There are animals in it too!"

"Pray let us hear it," said Christina.

He spoke the following stanzas—not quite correctly, but supplying for the moment's need where he could not recall:—

A gardein saw I, full of blosomed bowis,
Upon a river, in a grene mede,
There as sweetnesse evermore inough is,
With floures white, blewe, yelowe, and rede,
And cold welle streames, nothing dede,
That swommen full of smale fishes light,
With finnes rede, and scales silver bright.

On every bough the birdes heard I sing,
With voice of angell, in hir armonie,
That busied hem, hir birdes forth to bring,
The little pretty conies to hir play gan hie,
And further all about I gan espie,
The dredeful roe, the buck, the hart, and hind,
Squirrels, and beastes small, of gentle kind.

Of instruments of stringes in accorde,
Heard I so play, a ravishing swetnesse,
That God, that maker is of all and Lorde,
Ne heard never better, as I gesse,
Therewith a wind, unneth it might be lesse,
Made in the leaves grene a noise soft,
Accordant to the foules song on loft.

The aire of the place so attempre was,
That never was ther grevance of hot ne cold,
There was eke every holsome spice and gras,
Ne no man may there waxe sicke ne old,
Yet was there more joy o thousand fold,
Than I can tell or ever could or might,
There is ever clere day, and never night.

He modernized them also a little in repeating them, so that his hearers missed nothing through failing to understand the words: how much they gained, it were hard to say.

"It reminds one," commented Ian, "of Dante's paradise on the top of the hill of purgatory."

"I don't know anything about Dante either," said Mercy regretfully.

"There is plenty of time!" said Ian.

"But there is so much to learn!" returned Mercy in a hopeless tone.

"That is the joy of existence!" Ian replied. "We are not bound to know; we are only bound to learn.—But to return to my task: a man may really love a flower. In another poem Chaucer tells us that such is his delight in his books that no other pleasure can take him from them—

> Save certainly, when that the month of May
> Is comen, and that I heare the foules sing,
> And that the floures ginnen for to spring,
> Farwell my booke, and my devotion!

Poor people love flowers; rich people admire them."

"But," said Mercy, "how can one love a thing that has no life?"

Ian could have told her that whatever grows must live; he could further have told her his belief that life cannot be without its measure of consciousness; but it would have led to more difficulty, and away from the end he had in view. He felt also that no imaginable degree of consciousness in it was commensurate with the love he had himself for almost any

flower. His answer to Mercy's question was this :—

"The flowers come from the same heart as man himself, and are sent to be his companions and ministers. There is something divinely magical, because profoundly human in them. In some at least the human is plain; we see a face of childlike peace and confidence that appeals to our best. Our feeling for many of them doubtless owes something to childish associations; but how did they get their hold of our childhood? Why did they enter our souls at all? They are joyous, inarticulate children, come with vague messages from the father of all. If I confess that what they say to me sometimes makes me weep, how can I call my feeling for them anything but love? The eternal thing may have a thousand forms of which we know nothing yet!"

Mercy felt Ian must mean something she ought to like, if only she knew what it was; but he had not yet told her anything to

help her! He had, however, neither reached his end nor lost his way; he was leading her on—gently and naturally.

"I did not mean," he resumed, "that you must of necessity begin with the flowers. I was only inquiring whether at that point you were nearer to Nature.—Tell me—were you ever alone?"

"Alone!" repeated Mercy, thinking. "—Surely everybody has been many times alone!"

"Could you tell when last you were alone?"

She thought, but could not tell.

"What I want to ask you," said Ian, "is —did you ever feel alone? Did you ever for a moment inhabit loneliness? Did it ever press itself upon you that there was nobody near—that if you called nobody would hear? You are not alone while you know that you can have a fellow creature with you the instant you choose."

"I hardly think I was ever alone in that way."

"Then what I would have you do," continued Ian, "is—to make yourself alone in one of Nature's withdrawing-rooms, and seat yourself in one of Grannie's own chairs.—I am coming to the point at last!—Upon a day when the weather is fine, go out by yourself. Tell no one where you are going, or that you are going anywhere. Climb a hill. If you cannot get to the top of it, go high on the side of it. No book, mind! nothing to fill your thinking-place from another's! People are always saying 'I think,' when they are not thinking at all, when they are at best only passing the thoughts of others whom they do not even know.

"When you have got quite alone, when you do not even know the nearest point to anybody, sit down and be lonely. Look out on the loneliness, the wide world round you, and the great vault over you, with the lonely sun in the middle of it; fold your hands in your lap, and be still. Do not try to think anything. Do not try to call up

any feeling or sentiment or sensation; just be still. By and by, it may be, you will begin to know something of Nature. I do not know you well enough to be sure about it; but if you tell me afterwards how you fared, I shall then know you a little better, and perhaps be able to tell you whether Nature will soon speak to you, or not until, as Henry Vaughan says, some veil be broken in you."

They were approaching the cottage, and little more was said. They found Mrs. Palmer prepared to go, and Mercy was not sorry: she had had enough for a while. She was troubled at the thought that perhaps she was helplessly shut out from the life inhabited by the brothers. When she lay down, her own life seemed dull and poor. These men, with all their kindness, respect, attention, and even attendance upon them, did not show them the homage which the men of their own circle paid them!

"They will never miss us!" she said to

herself. "They will go on with their pantheism, or whatever it is, all the same!"

But they should not say she was one of those who talk but will not do! That scorn she could not bear!

All the time, however, the thing seemed to savour more of spell or cast of magic than philosophy: the means enjoined were suggestive of a silent incantation!

CHAPTER XIII.

GRANNY ANGRY.

It must not be supposed that all the visiting was on the part of those of the New House. The visits thence were returned by both matron and men. But somehow there was never the same freedom in the house as in the cottage. The difference did not lie in the presence of the younger girls: they were well behaved, friendly, and nowise disagreeable children. Doubtless there was something in the absence of books: it was of no use to jump up when a passage occurred; help was not at hand. But it was more the air of the place, the presence of so many common-place things, that clogged the wheels of thought. Neither, with all her knowledge of the world and all

her sweetness, did Mrs. Palmer understand the essentials of hospitality half so well as the widow of the late minister-chief. All of them liked, and confessed that they liked the cottage best. Even Christina felt something lacking in their reception. She regretted that the house was not grand enough to show what they were accustomed to.

Mrs. Palmer seldom understood the talk, and although she sat looking persistently content, was always haunted with a dim feeling that her husband would not be best pleased at so much intercourse between his rich daughters and those penniless country-fellows. But what could she do! the place where he had abandoned them was so dull, so solitary! the girls must not mope! Christina would wither up without amusement, and then good-bye to her beauty and all that depended upon it! In the purity of her motherhood, she more than liked the young men: happy mother she would think herself, were her daughters

to marry such men as these! The relations between them and their mother delighted her: they were one! their hearts were together! they understood each other! She could never have such bliss with her sons! Never since she gave them birth had she had one such look from either of hers as she saw pass every now and then from these to their mother! It would be like being born again to feel herself loved in that way! For any danger to the girls, she thought with a sigh how soon in London they would forget the young highlanders. Was there no possibility of securing one of them? What chance was there of Mercy's marrying well! she was so decidedly plain! Was the idea of marrying her into an old and once powerful family like that of the Macruadh, to her husband inconceivable? Could he not restore its property as the dowry of his unprized daughter! it would be to him but a trifle!—and he could stipulate that the chief should acknowledge the baronetcy

and use his title! Mercy would then be a woman of consequence, and Peregrine would have the Bible-honour of being the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in!—Such were some of the thoughts that would come and go in the brain of the mother as she sat; nor were they without a share in her readiness to allow her daughters to go out with the young men: she had an unquestioning conviction of their safety with them.

The days went by, and what to Christina had seemed imprisonment, began to look like some sort of liberty. She had scarce come nearer to sympathy with those whose society consoled her, but their talk had ceased to sound repulsive. She was infinitely more than a well-modelled wax-flower, and yet hardly a growing plant. More was needed to wake her than friends awake. It is wonderful how long the sleeping may go with the waking, and not discover any difference between them. But Grannie Nature was about to interfere.

The spring drew gently on. It would be long ere summer was summer enough to show. There seemed more of the destructive in the spring itself than of the genial—cold winds, great showers, days of steady rain, sudden assaults of hail and sleet. Still it was spring, and at length, one fine day with a bright sun, snow on the hills, and clouds in the east, but no sign of any sudden change, the girls went out for a walk, and took the younger girls with them.

A little way up the valley, out of sight of the cottage, a small burn came down its own dell to join that which flowed through the chief's farm. Its channel was wide, but except in time of rain had little water in it. About half a mile up its course it divided, or rather the channel did, for in one of its branches there was seldom any water. At the fork was a low rocky mound, with an ancient ruin of no great size—three or four fragments of thick walls, within whose plan grew a slender birch-tree. Thither went the little party, wandering up the stream :

the valley was sheltered; no wind but the south could reach it; and the sun, though it could not make it very warm, as it looked only aslant on its slopes, yet lighted both sides of it. Great white clouds passed slowly across the sky, with now and then a nearer black one threatening rain, but a wind overhead was carrying them quickly athwart.

Ian had seen the ladies pass, but made no effort to overtake them, although he was bound in the same direction: he preferred sauntering along with a book of ballads. Suddenly his attention was roused by a peculiar whistle, which he knew for that of Hector of the Stags: it was one of the few sounds he could make. Three times it was hurriedly repeated, and ere the third was over, Ian had discovered Hector high on a hill on the opposite side of the burn, waving his arms, and making eager signs to him. He stopped and set himself to understand. Hector was pointing with energy, but it was impossible to determine the exact direction: all that Ian could

gather was, that his presence was wanted somewhere farther on. He resumed his walk therefore at a rapid pace, whereupon Hector pointed higher. There on the eastern horizon, towards the north, almost down upon the hills, Ian saw a congeries of clouds in strangest commotion, such as he had never before seen in any home latitude — a mass of darkly variegated vapours manifesting a peculiar and appalling unrest. It seemed tormented by a gyrating storm, twisting and contorting it with unceasing change. Now the gray came writhing out, now the black came bulging through, now a dirty brown smeared the ashy white, and now the blue shone calmly out from eternal distances. At the season he could hardly think it a thunderstorm, and stood absorbed in the unusual phenomenon. But again, louder and more hurried, came the whistling, and again he saw Hector gesticulating, more wildly than before. Then he knew that someone must be in want of help or succour, and set off

running as hard as he could : he saw Hector keeping him in sight, and watching to give him further direction : perhaps the ladies had got into some difficulty !

When he arrived at the opening of the valley just mentioned, Hector's gesticulations made it quite plain it was up there he must go ; and as soon as he entered it, he saw that the cloudy turmoil was among the hills at its head. With that he began to suspect the danger the hunter feared, and almost the same instant heard the merry voices of the children. Running yet faster, he came in sight of them on the other side of the stream,—not a moment too soon. The valley was full of a dull roaring sound. He called to them as he ran, and the children saw and came running down toward him, followed by Mercy. She was not looking much concerned, for she thought it only the grumbling of distant thunder. But Ian saw, far up the valley, what looked like a low brown wall across it, and knew what it was.

"Mercy!" he cried, "run up the side of the hill directly; you will be drowned—swept away if you do not."

She looked incredulous, and glanced up the hill-side, but came on as if to cross the burn and join him.

"Do as I tell you," he cried, in a tone which few would have ventured to disregard, and turning darted across the channel toward her.

Mercy did not wait his coming, but took the children, each by a hand, and went a little way up the hill that immediately bordered the stream.

"Farther! farther!" cried Ian as he ran. "Where is Christina?"

"At the ruin," she answered.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Ian, and darted off, crying, "Up the hill with you! up the hill!"

Christina was standing by the birch-tree in the ruin, looking down the burn. She had heard Ian calling, and saw him running, but suspected no danger.

"Come; come directly; for God's sake, come!" he cried. "Look up the burn!" he added, seeing her hesitate bewildered.

She turned, looked, and came running to him, down the channel, white with terror. It was too late. The charging water, whose front rank was turf, and bushes, and stones, was almost upon her. The solid matter had retarded its rush, but it was now on the point of dividing against the rocky mound, to sweep along both sides, and turn it into an island. Ian bounded to her in the middle of the channel, caught her by the arm, and hurried her back to the mound as fast as they could run: it was the highest ground immediately accessible. As they reached it, the water broke with a roar against its rocky base, rose, swelled—and in a moment the island was covered with a brown, seething, swirling flood.

"Where's Mercy and the children?" gasped Christina, as the water rose upon her.

"Safe, safe!" answered Ian. "We must get to the ruin!"

The water was halfway up his leg, and rising fast. Their danger was but beginning. Would the old walls, in greater part built without mortar, stand the rush? If a tree should strike them, they hardly would! If the flood came from a waterspout, it would soon be over—only how high it might first rise, who could tell! Such were his thoughts as they struggled to the ruin, and stood up at the end of a wall parallel with the current.

The water was up to Christina's waist, and very cold. Here out of the rush, however, she recovered her breath in a measure, and showed not a little courage. Ian stood between her and the wall, and held her fast. The torrent came round the end of the wall from both sides, but the encounter and eddy of the two currents rather pushed them up against it. Without it they could not have stood.

The chief danger to Christina, however, was from the cold. With the water so high on her body, and flowing so fast, she could

not long resist it! Ian, therefore, took her round the knees, and lifted her almost out of the water.

"Put your arms up," he said, "and lay hold of the wall. Don't mind blinding me; my eyes are of little use at present. There—put your feet in my hands. Don't be frightened; I can hold you."

"I can't help being frightened!" she panted.

"We are in God's arms," returned Ian. "He is holding us."

"Are you *sure* we shall not be drowned?" she asked.

"No; but I am sure the water cannot take us out of God's arms."

This was not much comfort to Christina. She did not know anything about God—did not believe in him any more than most people. She knew God's arms only as the arms of Ian—and *they* comforted her, for she *felt* them!

How many of us actually believe in any support we do not immediately feel? in any

arms we do not see? But every help is from God; Ian's help was God's help; and though to believe in Ian was not to believe in God, it was a step on the road toward believing in God. He that believeth not in the good man whom he hath seen, how shall he believe in the God whom he hath not seen?

She began to feel a little better; the ghastly choking at her heart was almost gone.

"I shall break your arms!" she said.

"You are not very heavy," he answered; "and though I am not so strong as Alister, I am stronger than most men. With the help of the wall I can hold you a long time."

How was it that, now first in danger, self came less to the front with her than usual? It was that now first she was face to face with reality. Until this moment her life had been an affair of unrealities. Her selfishness had thinned, as it were vaporized, every reality that approached

her. Solidity is not enough to teach some natures reality; they must hurt themselves against the solid ere they realize its solidity. Small reality, small positivity of existence has water to a dreaming soul, half consciously gazing through half shut eyes at the soft river floating away in the moonlight: Christina was shivering in its grasp on her person, its omnipresence to her skin; its cold made her gasp and choke; the push and tug of it threatened to sweep her away like a whelmed log! It is when we are most aware of the *factitude* of things, that we are most aware of our need of God, and most able to trust in him; when most aware of their presence, the soul finds it easiest to withdraw from them, and seek its safety with the maker of it and them. The recognition of inexorable reality in any shape, or kind, or way, tends to rouse the soul to the yet more real, to its relations with higher and deeper existence. It is not the hysterical alone for whom the great dash of cold water is good. All who dream

life instead of living it, require some similar shock. Of the kind is every disappointment, every reverse, every tragedy of life. The true in even the lowest kind, is of the truth, and to be compelled to feel even that, is to be driven a trifle nearer to the truth of being, of creation, of God. Hence this sharp contact with Nature tended to make Christina less selfish: it made her forget herself so far as to care for her helper as well as herself.

It must be remembered, however, that her selfishness was not the cultivated and ingrained selfishness of a long life, but that of an uneducated, that is undeveloped nature. Her being had not degenerated by sinning against light known as light; it had not been consciously enlightened at all; it had scarcely as yet begun to grow. It was not lying dead, only unawaked. I would not be understood to imply that she was nowise to blame—but that she was by no means so much to blame as one who has but suspected the presence of a truth, and

from selfishness or self-admiration has turned from it. She was to blame wherever she had not done as her conscience had feebly told her; and she had not made progress just because she had neglected the little things concerning which she had promptings. There are many who do not enter the kingdom of heaven just because they will not believe the tiny key that is handed them, fit to open its hospitable gate.

"Oh, Mr. Ian, if you should be drowned for my sake!" she faltered with white lips. "You should not have come to me!"

"I would not wish a better death," said Ian.

"How can you talk so coolly about it!" she cried.

"Well," he returned, "what better way of going out of the world is there than by the door of help? No man cares much about what the idiots of the world call life! What is it whether we live in this room or another? The same who sent us here, sends for us out of here!"

"Most men care very much! You are wrong there!"

"I don't call those who do, men! They are only children! I know many men who would no more cleave to this life than a butterfly would fold his wings and creep into his deserted chrysalis-case. I do care to live—tremendously, but I don't mind where. He who made this room so well worth living in, may surely be trusted with the next!"

"I can't quite follow you," stammered Christina. "I am sorry. Perhaps it is the cold. I can't feel my hands, I am so cold."

"Leave the wall, and put your arms round my neck. The change will rest me, and the water is already falling! It will go as rapidly as it came!"

"How do you know that?"

"It has sunk nearly a foot in the last fifteen minutes: I have been carefully watching it, you may be sure! It must have been a waterspout, and however much

that may bring, it pours it out all at once."

"Oh!" said Christina, with a tremulous joyfulness; "I thought it would go on ever so long!"

"We shall get out of it alive!—God's will be done!"

"Why do you say that? Don't you really mean we are going to be saved?"

"Would you want to live, if he wanted you to die?"

"Oh, but you forget, Mr. Ian, I am not ready to die, like you!" sobbed Christina.

"Do you think anything could make it better for you to stop here, after God thought it better for you to go?"

"I dare not think about it."

"Be sure God will not take you away, if it be better for you to live here a little longer. But you will have to go sometime; and if you contrived to live after God wanted you to go, you would find yourself much less ready when the time came that

you must. But, my dear Miss Palmer, no one can be living a true life, to whom dying is a terror."

Christina was silent. He spoke the truth! She was not worth anything! How grand it was to look death in the face with a smile!

If she had been no more than the creature she had hitherto shown herself, not all the floods of the deluge could have made her think or feel thus: her real self, her divine nature had begun to wake. True, that nature was as yet no more like the divine, than the drowsy, arm-stretching, yawning child is like the merry elf about to spring from his couch, full of life, of play, of love. She had no faith in God yet, but it was much that she felt she was not worth anything.

You are right: it was odd to hold such a conversation at such a time! But Ian was an odd man. He actually believed that God was nearer to him than his own consciousness, yet desired communion with

him! and that Jesus Christ knew what he said when he told his disciples that the Father cared for his sparrows.

Only one human being witnessed their danger, and he could give no help. Hector of the Stags had crossed the main valley above where the torrent entered it, and coming over the hill, saw with consternation the flood-encompassed pair. If there had been help in man, he could have brought none; the raging torrent blocked the way both to the village and to the chief's house. He could only stand and gaze with his heart in his eyes.

Beyond the stream lay Mercy on the hill-side, with her face in the heather. Frozen with dread, she dared not look up. Had she moved but ten yards, she would have seen her sister in Ian's arms.

The children sat by her, white as death, with great lumps in their throats, and the silent tears rolling down their cheeks. It was the first time death had come near them.

A sound of sweeping steps came through the heather. They looked up: there was the chief striding toward them.

The flood had come upon him at work in his fields, whelming his growing crops. He had but time to unyoke his bulls, and run for his life. The bulls, not quite equal to the occasion, were caught and swept away. They were found a week after on the hills, nothing the worse, and nearly as wild as when first the chief took them in hand. The cottage was in no danger; and Nancy got a horse and the last of the cows from the farm-yard on to the crest of the ridge, against which the burn rushed roaring, just as the water began to invade the cowhouse and stable. The moment he reached the ridge, the chief set out to look for his brother, whom he knew to be somewhere up the valley; and having climbed to get an outlook, saw Mercy and the girls, from whose postures he dreaded that something had befallen them.

The girls uttered a cry of welcome, and

the chief answered, but Mercy did not lift her head.

"Mercy," said Alister softly, and kneeling laid his hand on her.

She turned to him such a face of blank misery as filled him with consternation.

"What has happened?" he asked.

She tried to speak, but could not.

"Where is Christina?" he went on.

She succeeded in bringing out the one word "ruin."

"Is anybody with her?"

"Ian."

"Oh!" he returned cheerily, as if then all would be right. But a pang shot through his heart, and it was as much for himself as for Mercy that he went on: "But God is with them, Mercy. If he were not, it would be bad indeed! Where he is, all is well!"

She sat up, and putting out her hand, laid it in his great palm.

"I wish I could believe that!" she said;

"but you know people *are* drowned sometimes!"

"Yes, surely! but if God be with them what does it matter! It is no worse than when a mother puts her baby into a big bath."

"It is cruel to talk like that to me when my sister is drowning!"

She gave a stifled shriek, and threw herself again on her face.

"Mercy," said the chief—and his voice trembled a little, "you do not love your sister more than I love my brother, and if he be drowned I shall weep; but I shall not be miserable as if a mocking devil were at the root of it, and not one who loves them better than we ever shall. But come; I think we shall find them somehow alive yet! Ian knows what to do in an emergency; and though you might not think it, he is a very strong man."

She rose immediately, and taking like a child the hand he offered her, went up the hill with him.

The girls ran before them, and presently gave a scream of joy.

"I see Chrissy! I see Chrissy!" cried one.

"Yes! there she is! I see her too!" cried the other.

Alister hurried up with Mercy. There was Christina! She seemed standing on the water!

Mercy burst into tears.

"But where's Ian?" she said, when she had recovered herself a little; "I don't see him!"

"He is there though, all right!" answered Alister. "Don't you see his hands holding her out of the water?"

And with that he gave a great shout:—

"Ian! Ian! hold on, old boy! I'm coming!"

Ian heard him, and was filled with terror, but had neither breath nor strength to answer. Along the hillside went Alister bounding like a deer, then turning sharp, shot headlong down, dashed into the torrent

—and was swept away like a cork. Mercy gave a scream, and ran down the hill.

He was not carried very far, however. In a moment or two he had recovered himself, and crept out gasping and laughing, just below Mercy. Ian did not move. He was so benumbed that to change his position an inch would, he well knew, be to fall.

And now Hector began to behave oddly. He threw a stone, which went in front of Ian and Christina. Then he threw another, which went behind them. Then he threw a third, and Christina felt her hat caught by a bit of string. She drew it toward her as fast as numbness would permit, and found at the end a small bottle. She managed to get it uncorked, and put it to Ian's lips. He swallowed a mouthful, and made her take some. Hector stood on one side, the chief on the other, and watched the proceeding.

"What would mother say, Alister!" cried Ian across the narrowing water.

In the joy of hearing his voice, Alister

rushed again into the torrent; and, after a fierce struggle, reached the mound, where he scrambled up, and putting his arms round Ian's legs with a shout, lifted the two at once like a couple of babies.

"Come! come, Alister! don't be silly!" said Ian. "Set me down!"

"Give me the girl then."

"Take her!"

Christina turned on him a sorrowful gaze as Alister took her.

"I have killed you!" she said.

"You have done me the greatest favour," he replied.

"What?" she asked.

"Accepted help."

She burst out crying. She had not shed a tear before.

"Get on the top of the wall, Ian, out of the wet," said Alister.

"You can't tell what the water may have done to the foundations, Alister! I would rather not break my leg! It is so frozen it would never mend again!"

As they talked, the torrent had fallen so much, that Hector of the Stags came wading from the other side. A few minutes more, and Alister carried Christina to Mercy.

"Now," he said, setting her down, "you must walk."

Ian could not cross without Hector's help; he seemed to have no legs. They set out at once for the cottage.

"How will your crops fare, Alister?" asked Ian.

"Part will be spoiled," replied the chief; "part not much the worse."

The torrent had rushed half-way up the ridge, then swept along the flank of it, and round the end in huge bulk, to the level on the other side. The water lay soaking into the fields. The valley was desolated. What green things had not been uprooted or carried away with the soil, were laid flat. Everywhere was mud, and scattered all over were lumps of turf, with heather, brushwood, and small trees. But it was early in the year, and there was hope!

I will spare the description of the haste and hurrying to and fro in the little house —the blowing of fires, the steaming pails and blankets, the hot milk and tea! Mrs. Macruadh rolled up her sleeves, and worked like a good housemaid. Nancy shot hither and thither on her bare feet like a fawn—you could not say she ran, and certainly she did not walk. Alister got Ian to bed, and rubbed him with rough towels—himself more wet than he, for he had been rolled over and over in the torrent. Christina fell asleep, and slept many hours. When she woke, she said she was quite well; but it was weeks before she was like herself. I doubt if ever she was quite as strong again. For some days Ian confessed to an aching in his legs and arms. It was the cold of the water, he said; but Alister insisted it was from holding Christina so long.

"Water could not hurt a highlander!" said Alister.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHANGE.

Christina walked home without difficulty, but the next day did not leave her bed, and it was a fortnight before she was able to be out of doors. When Ian and she met, her manner was not quite the same as before. She seemed a little timid. As she shook hands with him her eyes fell; and when they looked up again as if ashamed of their involuntary retreat, her face was rosy; but the slight embarrassment disappeared as soon as they began to talk. No affectation or formality, however, took its place: in respect of Ian her falseness was gone. The danger she had been in, and her deliverance through the voluntary sharing of it by Ian,

had awaked the simpler, the real nature of the girl, hitherto buried in impressions and their responses. She had lived but as a mirror meant only to reflect the outer world: something of an operative existence was at length beginning to appear in her. She was growing a woman. And the first stage in that growth is to become as a little child.

The child, however, did not for some time show her face to any but Ian. In his presence Christina had no longer self-assertion or wile. Without seeking his notice she would yet manifest an almost childish willingness to please him. It was no sudden change. She had, ever since their adventure, been haunted, both awake and asleep, by his presence, and it had helped her to some discoveries regarding herself. And the more she grew real, the nearer, that is, that she came to being a *person*, the more she came under the influence of his truth, his reality. It is only through live relation to others that any individuality crystallizes.

"You saved my life, Ian!" she said one evening for the tenth time.

"It pleased God you should live," answered Ian.

"Then you really think," she returned, "that God interfered to save us?"

"No, I do not; I don't think he ever interferes."

"Mr. Sercombe says everything goes by law, and God never interferes; my father says he does interfere sometimes."

"Would you say a woman interfered in the management of her own house? Can one be said to interfere where he is always at work? He is the necessity of the universe, ever and always doing the best that can be done, and especially for the individual, for whose sake alone the cosmos exists. If we had been drowned, we should have given God thanks for saving us."

"I do not understand you!"

"Should we not have given thanks to find ourselves lifted out of the cold rushing waters, in which we felt our strength slowly sinking?"

"But you said *drowned!* How could we have thanked God for deliverance if we were drowned?"

"What!—not when we found ourselves above the water, safe and well, and more alive than ever? Would it not be a dreadful thing to lie tossed for centuries under the sea-waves to which the torrent had borne us? Ah, how few believe in a life beyond, a larger life, more awake, more earnest, more joyous than this!"

"Oh, *I* do! but that is not what one means by *life;* that is quite a different kind of thing!"

"How do you make out that it is so different? If I am I, and you are you, how can it be very different? The root of things is individuality, unity of idea, and persistence depends on it. God is the one perfect individual; and while this world is his and that world is his, there can be no inconsistency, no violent difference, between there and here."

"Then you must thank God for every-

thing—thank him if you are drowned, or burnt, or anything!"

"Now you understand me! That is precisely what I mean."

"Then I can never be good, for I could never bring myself to that!"

"You cannot bring yourself to it; no one could. But we must come to it. I believe we shall all be brought to it."

"Never me! I should not wish it!"

"You do not wish it; but you may be brought to wish it; and without it the end of your being cannot be reached. No one, of course, could ever give thanks for what he did not know or feel as good. But what *is* good must come to be felt good. Can you suppose that Jesus at any time could not thank his Father for sending him into the world?"

"You speak as if we and he were of the same kind!"

"He and we are so entirely of the same kind, that there is no bliss for him or for you or for me but in being the loving obedient child of the one Father."

"You frighten me! If I cannot get to heaven any other way than that, I shall never get there."

"You will get there, and you will get there that way and no other. If you could get there any other way, it would be to be miserable."

"Something tells me you speak the truth; but it is terrible! I do not like it."

"Naturally."

She was on the point of crying. They were alone in the drawing-room of the cottage, but his mother might enter any moment, and Ian said no more.

It was not a drawing toward the things of peace that was at work in Christina: it was an urging painful sense of separation from Ian. She had been conscious of some antipathy even toward him, so unlike were her feelings, thoughts, judgments, to his: this feeling had changed to its opposite.

A meeting with Ian was now to Christina the great event of day or week; but Ian, in

love with the dead, never thought of danger to either.

One morning she woke from a sound and dreamless sleep, and getting out of bed, drew aside the curtains, looked out, and then opened her window. It was a lovely spring-morning. The birds were singing loud in the fast greening shrubbery. A soft wind was blowing. It came to her, and whispered something of which she understood only that it was both lovely and sad. The sun, but a little way up, was shining over hills and cone-shaped peaks, whose shadows, stretching eagerly westward, were yet ever shortening eastward. His light was gentle, warm, and humid, as if a little sorrowful, she thought, over his many dead children, that he must call forth so many more to the new life of the reviving year. Suddenly as she gazed, the little clump of trees against the hillside stood as she had never seen it stand before—as if the sap in them were no longer colourless, but red with human life; nature

was alive with a presence she had never seen before; it was instinct with a meaning, an intent, a soul; the mountains stood against the sky as if reaching upward, knowing something, waiting for something; over all was a glory. The change was far more wondrous than from winter to summer; it was not as if a dead body, but a dead soul had come alive. What could it mean? Had the new aspect come forth to answer this glow in her heart, or was the glow in her heart the reflection of this new aspect of the world? She was ready to cry aloud, not with joy, not from her feeling of the beauty, but with a *sensation* almost, hitherto unknown, therefore nameless. It was a new and marvellous interest in the world, a new sense of life in herself, of life in everything, a recognition of brother-existence, a life-contact with the universe, a conscious flash of the divine in her soul, a throb of the pure joy of being. She was nearer God than she had ever been before. But she did not know this—might never

in this world know it; she understood nothing of what was going on in her, only felt it go on; it was not love of God that was moving in her. Yet she stood in her white dress like one risen from the grave, looking in sweet bliss on a new heaven and a new earth, made new by the new opening of her eyes. To save man or woman, the next thing to the love of God is the love of man or woman; only let no man or woman mistake the love of love for love!

She started, grew white, stood straight up, grew red as a sunset:—was it—could it be?—"Is this love?" she said to herself, and for minutes she hardly moved.

It was love. Whether love was in her or not, she was in love—and it might get inside her. She hid her face in her hands, and wept.

With what opportunities I have had of studying, I do not say *understanding*, the human heart, I should not have expected such feeling from Christina—and she wondered at it herself. Till a child is

awake, how tell his mood?—until a woman is awaked, how tell her nature? Who knows himself?—and how then shall he know his neighbour?

For who can know anything except on the supposition of its remaining the same? and the greatest change of all, next to being born again, is beginning to love. The very faculty of loving had been hitherto repressed in the soul of Christina—by poor education, by low family and social influences, by familiarity with the worship of riches, by vanity, and consequent hunger after the attentions of men; but now at length she was in love.

At breakfast, though she was silent, she looked so well that her mother complimented her on her loveliness. Had she been more of a mother, she might have seen cause for anxiety in this fresh bourgeoning of her beauty.

CHAPTER XV.

LOVE ALLODIAL.

While the chief went on in his humble way, enjoying life and his lowly position; seeming, in the society of his brother, to walk the outer courts of heaven; and, unsuspicious of the fact, growing more and more in love with the ill educated, but simple, open, and wise Mercy, a trouble was gathering for him of which he had no presentiment. We have to be delivered from the evils of which we are unaware as well as from those we hate; and the chief had to be set free from his unconscious worship of Mammon. He did not worship Mammon by yielding homage to riches; he did not make a man's money his pedestal; had he

been himself a millionaire, he would not have connived at being therefore held in honour; but, ever consciously aware of the deteriorating condition of the country, and pitifully regarding the hundred and fifty souls who yet looked to him as their head, often turning it over in his mind how to shepherd them should things come to a crisis, his abiding, ever-recurring comfort was the money from the last sale of the property, accumulating ever since, and now to be his in a very few years: he always thought, I say, first of this money and not first of God. He imagined it an inexhaustible force, a power with which for his clan he could work wonders. It is the common human mistake to think of money as a force and not as a mere tool. But he never thought of it otherwise than as belonging to the clan; never imagined the least liberty to use it save in the direct service of his people. And all the time, the very shadow of this money was disappearing from the face of the earth!

It had scarcely been deposited where the old laird judged it as safe as in the Bank of England, when schemes and speculations were initiated by the intrusted company which brought into jeopardy everything it held, and things had been going from bad to worse ever since. Nothing of this was yet known, for the directors had from the first carefully muffled up the truth, avoiding the least economy lest it should be interpreted as hinting at any need of prudence; living in false show with the very money they were thus lying away, warming and banqueting their innocent neighbours with fuel and wine stolen from their own cellars; and working worse wrong and more misery under the robe of imputed righteousness, that is, respectability, than could a little army of burglars. Unawares to a trusting multitude, the vacant eyes of loss were drawing near to stare them out of hope and comfort; and annihilation had long closed in upon the fund which the chief regarded as the sheet-anchor of his

clan: he trusted in Mammon, and Mammon had played him one of his rogue's-tricks. The most degrading wrong to ourselves, and the worst eventual wrong to others, is to trust in any thing or person but the living God: it was an evil thing from which the chief had sore need to be delivered. Even those who help us we must regard as the loving hands of the great heart of the universe, else we do God wrong, and will come to do them wrong also.

And there was more yet of what we call mischief brewing in another quarter to like hurt.

Mr. Peregrine Palmer was not now so rich a man as when he bought his highland property; also he was involved in affairs of doubtful result. It was natural, therefore, that he should begin to think of the said property not merely as an ornament of life, but as something to fall back upon. He feared nothing, however, more unpleasant than a temporary embarrassment. Had not his family been in the front for three

generations! Had he not a vested right in success! Had he not a claim for the desire of his heart on whatever power it was that he pictured to himself as throned in the heavens! It never came into his head that, seeing there were now daughters in the family, it might be worth the while of that Power to make a poor man of him for their sakes; or that neither he, his predecessors, nor his sons, had ever come near enough to anything human to be fit for having their pleasures taken from them. But what I have to do with is the new aspect his Scotch acres now put on: he must see to making the best of them! and that best would be a deer-forest! He and his next neighbour might together effect something worth doing! Therefore all crofters or villagers likely to trespass must be got rid of—and first and foremost the shepherds, for they had endless opportunities of helping themselves to a deer. Where there were sheep there must be shepherds: they would make a clearance

of both! The neighbour referred to, a certain Mr. Brander, who had made his money by sharp dealing in connection with a great Russian railway, and whom Mr. Peregrine Palmer knew before in London, had enlightened him on many things, and amongst others on the shepherds' passion for deer-stalking. Being in the company of the deer, he said, the whole day, and the whole year through, they were thoroughly acquainted with their habits, and were altogether too much both for the deer and for their owners. A shepherd would take the barrel of his gun from the stock, and thrust it down his back, or put it in a hollow crook, and so convey it to the vicinity of some spot frequented by a particular animal, to lie hidden there for his opportunity. In the hills it was impossible to tell with certainty whence came the sound of a shot; and no rascal of them would give information concerning another! In short, there was no protecting the deer without uprooting and expelling the peasantry!

The village of the Clanruadh was on Mr. Brander's land, and was dependent in part on the produce of small pieces of ground, the cultivators of which were mostly men with other employment as well. Some made shoes of the hides, others cloth and clothes of the wool of the country. Some were hinds on neighbouring farms, but most were shepherds, for there was now very little tillage. Almost all the land formerly cultivated had been given up to grass and sheep, and not a little of it was steadily returning to that state of nature from which it had been reclaimed, producing heather, ling, blueberries, *cnowperts*, and cranberries. The hamlet was too far from the sea for much fishing, but some of its inhabitants would join relatives on the coast and go fishing with them, when there was nothing else to be done. But many of those who looked to the sea for help had lately come through a hard time, in which they would have died but for the sea-weed and shell-fish the shore afforded them ; yet such was

their spirit of independence that a commission appointed to inquire into their necessity, found scarcely one willing to acknowledge any want: such was the class of men and women now doomed, at the will of two common-minded, greedy men, to expulsion from the houses and land they had held for generations, and loved with a love unintelligible to their mean-souled oppressors.

Ian, having himself learned the lesson that, so long as a man is dependent on anything earthly, he is not a free man, was very desirous to have his brother free also. He could not be satisfied to leave the matter where, on their way home that night from *the tomb*, as they called their cave-house, their talk had left it. Alister's love of the material world, of the soil of his ancestral acres, was, Ian plainly saw, not yet one with the meaning and will of God: he was not yet content that the home of his fathers should fare as the father of fathers pleased. He was therefore on the outlook for the

right opportunity of having another talk with him on the subject.

That those who are trying to be good are more continuously troubled than the indifferent, has for ages been a puzzle. "I saw the wicked spreading like a green bay tree," says king David; and he was far from having fathomed the mystery when he got his mind at rest about it. Is it not simply that the righteous are worth troubling? that they are capable of receiving good from being troubled? As a man advances, more and more is required of him. A wrong thing in the good man becomes more and more wrong as he draws nearer to freedom from it. His friends may say how seldom he offends; but every time he offends, he is the more to blame. Some are allowed to go on because it would be of no use to stop them yet; nothing would yet make them listen to wisdom. There must be many who, like Dives, need the bitter contrast between the good things of this life and the evil things of the next, to

wake them up. In this life they are not only fools, and insist on being treated as fools, but would have God consent to treat them as if he too had no wisdom! The laird was one in whom was no guile, but he was far from perfect: any man is far from perfect whose sense of well-being could be altered by any change of circumstance. A man unable to do without this thing or that, is not yet in sight of his perfection, therefore not out of sight of suffering. They who do not know suffering, may well doubt if they have yet started on the way *to be*. If clouds were gathering to burst in fierce hail on the head of the chief, it was that he might be set free from yet another of the cords that bound him. He was like a soaring eagle from whose foot hung, trailing on the earth, the line by which his tyrant could at his will pull him back to his inglorious perch.

To worship truly is to treat according to indwelling worth. The highest worship of Nature is to worship toward it, as David

and Daniel worshipped toward the holy place. But even the worship of Nature herself might be an ennobling idolatry, so much is the divine present in her. There is an intense, almost sensuous love of Nature, such as the chief confessed to his brother, which is not only one with love to the soul of Nature, but tends to lift the soul of man up to the lord of Nature. To love the soul of Nature, however, does not secure a man from loving the body of Nature in the low Mammon-way of possession. A man who loves the earth even as the meek love it, may also love it in a way hostile to such possession of it as is theirs. The love of possessing as property, must, unchecked, come in time to annihilate in a man the inheritance of the meek.

A few acres of good valley-land, with a small upland pasturage, and a space of barren hill-country, had developed in the chief a greater love of the land as a possession than would have come of entrance upon an undiminished inheritance. He clave to

the ground remaining to him, as to the last remnant of a vanishing good.

One day the brothers were lying on the westward slope of the ridge, in front of the cottage. A few sheep, small, active, black-faced, were feeding around them: it was no use running away, for the chief's colley was lying beside him! The laird every now and then buried his face in the short sweet mountain-grass—like that of the downs in England, not like the rich sown grass on the cultivated bank of the burn.

"I believe I love the grass," he said, "as much, Ian, as your Chaucer loved the daisy!"

"Hardly so much, I should think!" returned Ian.

"Why do you think so?"

"I doubt if grass can be loved so much as a flower."

"Why not?"

"Because the one is a mass, the other an individual."

"I understand."

"I have a fear, Alister, that you are in danger of avarice," said Ian, after a pause.

"Avarice, Ian! What can you mean?"

"You are as free, Alister, from the love of money, as any man I ever knew, but that is not enough. Did you ever think of the origin of the word *avarice?*"

"No."

"It comes—at least it seems to me to come—from the same root as the verb *have*. It is the desire to call *things* ours—the desire of company which is not of our kind—company such as, if small enough, you would put in your pocket and carry about with you. We call the holding in the hand, or the house, or the pocket, or the power, *having;* but things so held cannot really be *had; having* is but an illusion in regard to *things*. It is only what we can be *with* that we can really possess—that is, what is of our kind, from God to the lowest animal partaking of humanity. A love can never be lost; it is a possession; but who can take his diamond ring into the somewhere

beyond?—it is not a possession. God only can be ours perfectly; nothing called property can be ours at all."

"I know it—with my head at least," said Alister; "but I am not sure how you apply it to me."

"You love your country—don't you, Alister?"

"I do."

"What do you mean by *loving your country?*"

"It is hard to say all at once. The first thing that comes to me is, that I would rather live in it than in any other."

"Would you care to vaunt your country at the expense of any other?"

"Not if it did not plainly excel—and even then it might be neither modest nor polite!"

"Would you feel bound to love a man more because he was a fellow-countryman?"

"Other things being equal, I could not help it."

"Other things not being equal,—?"

"I should love the best man best—Scotsman or negro."

"That is as I thought of you. For my part, my love for my own people has taught me to love every man, be his colour or country what it may. The man whose patriotism is not leading him in that direction has not yet begun to be a true patriot. Let him go to St. Paul and learn, or stay in his own cellar and be an idiot.—But now, from loving our country, let us go down the other way:—Do you love the highlands or the lowlands best? You love the highlands, of course, you say. And what district do you like best? Our own. What parish? Your father's. What part of the parish? Why this, where at this moment we are lying. Now let me ask, have you, by your love for this piece of the world, which you will allow me to call *ours*, learned to love the whole world in like fashion?"

"I cannot say so. I do not think we can love the whole world in the same way as our own part of it—the part where we

were born and bred! It is a portion of our very being."

"If your love to what we call our own land is a love that cannot spread, it seems to me of a questionable kind—of a kind involving the false notion of *having?* The love that is eternal is alone true, and that is the love of the essential, which is the universal. We love indeed individuals, even to their peculiarities, but only *because* of what lies under and is the life of them —what they share with every other, the eternal God-born humanity *which is the person.* Without this humanity where were your friend? Mind, I mean no abstraction, but the live individual humanity. Do you see what I am driving at? I would extend my love of the world to all the worlds; my love of humanity to all that inhabit them. I want, from being a Scotsman, to be a Briton, then a European, then a cosmopolitan, then a dweller of the universe, a lover of all the worlds I see, and shall one day know. In the face of such a hope, I

find my love for this ground of my father's —not indeed less than before, but very small. It has served its purpose in having begun in me love of the revelation of God. Wherever I see the beauty of the Lord, that shall be to me his holy temple. Our Lord was sent first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel:—how would you bear to be told that he loved them more than Africans or Scotsmen?"

"I could not bear it."

"Then, Alister, do you not see that the love of our mother earth is meant to be but a beginning; and that such love as yours for the land belongs to that love of things which must perish? You seem to me not to allow it to blossom, but to keep it a hard bud; and a bud that will not blossom is a coffin. A flower is a completed idea, a thought of God, a creature whose body is most perishable, but whose soul, its idea, cannot die. With the idea of it in you, the withering of the flower you can bear. The God in it is yours always.

Every spring you welcome the daisy anew; every time the primrose departs, it grows more dear by its death. I say there must be a better way of loving the ground on which we were born, than that whence the loss of it would cause us torture."

Alister listened as to a prophecy of evil.

"Rather than that cottage and those fields should pass into the hands of others," he said, almost fiercely, "I would see them sunk in a roaring tide!"

Ian rose, and walked slowly away.

Alister lay clutching the ground with his hands. For a passing moment Ian felt as if he had lost him.

"Lord, save him from this demon-love," he said, and sat down among the pines.

In a few minutes, Alister came to him.

"You cannot mean, Ian," he said—and his face was white through all its brown, "that I am to think no more of the fields of my fathers than of any other ground on the face of the earth!"

"Think of them as the ground God gave

to our fathers, which God may see fit to take from us again, and I shall be content —for the present," answered Ian.

"Do not be vexed with me," cried Alister. "I want to think as well as do what is right; but you cannot know how I feel or you would spare me. I love the very stones and clods of the land! The place is to me as Jerusalem to the Jews:—you know what the psalm says:—

> Thy saints take pleasure in her stones,
> Her very dust to them is dear!"

"They loved their land as *theirs*," said Ian, "and have lost it!"

"I know I must be cast out of it! I know I must die and go from it; but I shall come back and wander about the fields and the hills with you and our father and mother!"

"And how about horse and dog?" asked Ian, willing to divert his thoughts for a moment.

"Well! Daoimean and Luath are so

good that I don't see why I should not have them!"

"No more do I!" responded Ian. "We may be sure God will either let you have them, or show you reason to content you for not having them. No love of any *thing* is to be put in the same thought-pocket with love for the poorest creature that has life. But I am sometimes not a little afraid lest your love for the soil get right in to your soul. We are here but pilgrims and strangers. God did not make the world to be dwelt in, but to be journeyed through. We must not love it as he did not mean we should. If we do, he may have great trouble and we much hurt ere we are set free from that love. Alister, would you willingly walk out of the house to follow him up and down for ever?"

"I don't know about *willingly*," replied Alister, "but if I were sure it was he calling me, I am sure I *would* walk out and follow him."

"What if your love of house and lands

prevented you from being sure, when he called you, that it was he?"

"That would be terrible! But he would not leave me so. He would not forsake me in my ignorance!"

"No. Having to take you from everything, he would take everything from you!"

Alister went into the house.

He did not know how much of the worldly mingled with the true in him. He loved his people, and was unselfishly intent on helping them to the utmost; but the thought that he was their chief was no small satisfaction to him; and if the relation between them was a grand one, self had there the more soil wherein to spread its creeping choke-grass roots. In like manner, his love of nature nourished the parasite *possession*. He had but those bare hill-sides, and those few rich acres, yet when, from his eyry on the hill-top, he looked down among the valleys, his heart would murmur within him, "From my feet the brook flows gurg-

ling to water my fields! The wild moors around me feed my sheep! Yon glen is full of my people!" Even with the pure smell of the earth, mingled the sense of its possession. When, stepping from his cave-house, he saw the sun rise on the out-stretched grandeur of the mountain-world, and felt the earth a new creation as truly as when Adam first opened his eyes on its glory, his heart would give one little heave more at the thought that a portion of it was his own. But all is man's only *because* it is God's. The true possession of anything is to see and feel in it what God made it for; and the uplifting of the soul by that knowledge, is the joy of true having. The Lord had no land of his own. He did not care to have it, any more than the twelve legions of angels he would not pray for: his pupils must not care for things he did not care for. He had no place to lay his head in—had not even a grave of his own. For want of a boat he had once to walk the rough Galilean sea. True, he might have gone with the

rest, but he had to stop behind to pray: he could not do without that. Once he sent a fish to fetch him money, but only to pay a tax. He had even to borrow the few loaves and little fishes from a boy, to feed his five thousand with.

The half-hour which Alister spent in the silence of his chamber, served him well: a ray as of light polarized entered his soul in its gloom. He returned to Ian, who had been all the time walking up and down the ridge.

"You are right, Ian!" he said. "I do love the world! If I were deprived of what I hold, I should doubt God! I fear, oh, I fear, Ian, he is going to take the land from me!"

"We must never fear the will of God, Alister! We are not right until we can pray heartily, not say submissively, 'Thy will be done!' We have not one interest, and God another. When we wish what he does not wish, we are not more against him than against our real selves. We are

traitors to the human when we think anything but the will of God desirable, when we fear our very life."

It was getting toward summer, and the days were growing longer.

"Let us spend a night in the tomb!" said Ian; and they fixed a day in the following week.

CHAPTER XVI.

MERCY CALLS ON GRANNIE.

Although the subject did not again come up, Mercy had not forgotten what Ian had said about listening for the word of Nature, and had resolved to get away the first time she could, and see whether Grannie, as Ian had called her, would have anything to do with her. It were hard to say what she expected—something half magical rather than anything quite *natural*. The notions people have of spiritual influence are so unlike the facts, that, when it begins they never recognize it, but imagine something common at work. When the Lord came, those who were looking for him did not know him :—was he not a man like them-

selves! did they not know his father and mother!

It was a fine spring morning when Mercy left the house to seek an interview with Nature somewhere among the hills. She took a path she knew well, and then struck into a sheep-track she had never tried. Up and up she climbed, nor spent a thought on the sudden changes to which at that season, and amongst those hills, the weather is subject. With no anxiety as to how she might fare, she was yet already not without some awe: she was at length on her pilgrimage to the temple of Isis!

Not until she was beyond sight of any house, did she begin to feel alone. It was a new sensation, and of a mingled sort. But the slight sense of anxiety and fear that made part of it, was soon overpowered by something not unlike the exhilaration of a child escaped from school. This grew and grew until she felt like a wild thing that had been caught, and had broken loose. Now first, almost, she seemed to have begun

to live, for now first was she free! She might lie in the heather, walk in the stream, do as she pleased! No one would interfere with her, no one say *Don't!* She felt stronger and fresher than ever in her life; and the farther she went, the greater grew the pleasure. The little burn up whose banks, now the one and now the other, she was walking, kept on welcoming her unaccustomed feet to the realms of solitude and liberty. For ever it seemed coming to meet her, hasting, running steep, as if straight out of the heaven to which she was drawing nearer and nearer. The wind woke now and then, and blew on her for a moment, as if tasting her, to see what this young Psyche was that had floated up into the wild thin air of the hills. The incessant meeting of the brook made it a companion to her although it could not go her way, and was always leaving her. But it kept her from the utter loneliness she sought; for loneliness is imperfect while sound is by, especially a sing-sound, and the brook was one of

Nature's self-playing song-instruments. But she came at length to a point where the ground was too rough to let her follow its path any more, and turning from it, she began to climb a steep ridge. The growing and deepening silence as she went farther and farther from the brook, promised the very place for her purpose on the top of the heathery ridge.

But when she reached it and looked behind her, lo, the valley she had left lay at her very feet! The world had rushed after and caught her! She had not got away from it! It was like being enchanted! She thought she was leaving it far behind, but the nature she sought to escape that she might find Nature, would not let her go! It kept following her as if to see that she fell into no snare, neither was too sternly received by the loftier spaces. She could distinguish one of the laird's men, ploughing in the valley below: she knew him by his red waistcoat! Almost fiercely she turned and made for the next ridge: it would

screen her from the world she had left; it should not spy upon her! The danger of losing her way back never suggested itself. She had not learned that the look of things as you go, is not their look when you turn to go back; that with your attitude their mood will have altered. Nature is like a lobster-pot: she lets you easily go on, but not easily return.

When she gained the summit of the second ridge, she looked abroad on a country of which she knew nothing. It was like the face of an utter stranger. Not far beyond rose yet another ridge: she must see how the world looked from that! On and on she went, crossing ridge after ridge, but no place invited her to stay and be still.

She found she was weary, and spying in the midst of some short heather a great stone, sat down, and gave herself up to the rest that stole upon her. Though the sun was warm, the air was keen, and, hot with climbing, she turned her face to it, and drank in its refreshing with delight.

She looked around; not a trace of humanity was visible—nothing but brown and gray and green hills, with the clear sky over her head, and in the north a black cloud creeping up from the horizon. Another sense than that of rest awoke in her; now first in her life the sense of loneliness absolute began to possess her. And therewith suddenly descended upon her a farther something she had never known; it was as if the loneliness, or what is the same thing, the presence of her own being without another to qualify and make it reasonable and endurable, seized and held her. The silence gathered substance, grew as it were solid, and closing upon her, imprisoned her. Was it not rather that the Soul of Nature, unprevented, unthwarted by distracting influences, found a freer entrance to hers, but she, not yet in harmony with it, felt its contact as alien—as bondage therefore and not liberty? She was nearer than ever she had been to knowing the presence of the God who is always nearer to us than aught else.

Yea, something seemed, through the very persistence of its silence, to say to her at last, and keep saying, "Here I am!" She looked behind her in sudden terror: no form was there. She sent out her gaze to the horizon: the huge waves of the solid earth stood up against the sky, sinking so slowly she could not see them sink: they stood mouldering away, biding their time. They were of those "who only stand and wait," fulfilling the will of him who set them to crumble till the hour of the new heavens and the new earth arrive. There was no visible life between her and the great silent mouldering hills. On her right hand lay a blue segment of the ever restless sea, but so far that its commotion seemed a yet deeper rest than that of the immovable hills.

She sat and sat, but nothing came, nothing seemed coming to her. The hope Ian had given her was not to be fulfilled! For here there was no revelation! She was not of the kind Nature could speak to!

She began to grow uncomfortable—to

feel as if she had done something wrong—as if she was a child put into the corner—a corner of the great universe, to learn to be sorry for something. Certainly something was wrong with her—but what? Why did she feel so uncomfortable? Was she so silly as mind being alone? There was nothing in these mountains that would hurt her! The red deer were sometimes dangerous, but none were even within sight! Yet something like fear was growing in her! Why should she be afraid? Everything about her certainly did look strange, as if she had nothing to do with it, and it had nothing to do with her; but that was all! Ian Macruadh must be wrong! How could there be any such bond as he said between Nature and the human heart, when the first thing she felt when alone with her, was fear! The world was staring at her! She was the centre of a fixed, stony regard from all sides! The earth, and the sea, and the sky, were watching her! She did not like it! She would rise and shake off

the fancy! But she did not rise; something held her to her thinking. Just so she would, when a child in the dark, stand afraid to move lest the fear itself, lying in wait like a tigress, should at her first motion pounce upon her. The terrible, persistent silence!—would nothing break it! And there was in herself a response to it—something that was in league with it, and kept telling her that things were not all right with her; that she ought not to be afraid, yet had good reason for being afraid; that she knew of no essential safety. There must be some refuge, some impregnable hiding-place, for the thing was a necessity, and she ought to know of it! There must be a human condition of never being afraid, of knowing nothing to be afraid of! She wondered whether, if she were quite good, went to church twice every Sunday, and read her bible every morning, she would come not to be afraid of—she did not know what. It would be grand to have no fear of person or thing! She was sometimes

afraid of her own father, even when she knew no reason! How that mountain with the horn kept staring at her!

It was all nonsense! She was silly! She would get up and go home: it must be time!

But things were not as they should be! Something was required of her! Was it God wanting her to do something? She had never thought whether he required anything of her! She must be a better girl! Then she would have God with her, and not be afraid!

And all the time it was God near her that was making her unhappy. For, as the Son of Man came not to send peace on the earth but a sword, so the first visit of God to the human soul is generally in a cloud of fear and doubt, rising from the soul itself at his approach. The sun is the cloud-dispeller, yet often he must look through a fog if he would visit the earth at all. The child, not being a son, does not know his father. He may know he is what is called

a father; what the word means he does not know. How then should he understand when the father comes to deliver him from his paltry self, and give him life indeed!

She tried to pray. She said, "Oh God! forgive me, and make me good. I want to be good!" Then she rose.

She went some little way without thinking where she was going, and then found she did not even know from what direction she had come. A sharp new fear, quite different from the former, now shot through her heart: she was lost! She had told no one she was going anywhere! No one would have a notion where to look for her! She had been beginning to feel hungry, but fear drove hunger away. All she knew was that she must not stay there. *Here* was nowhere; walking on she might come somewhere—that is, among human beings! So out she set on her weary travel from nowhere to somewhere, giving Nature little thanks. She did not suspect that her grandmother had been doing anything for

her by the space around her, or that now, by the tracklessness, the lostness, she was doing yet more. On and on she walked, climbing the one hillside and descending the other, going she knew not whither, hardly hoping she drew one step nearer home.

All at once her strength went from her. She sat down and cried. But with her tears came the thought how the chief and his brother talked of God. She remembered she had heard in church that men ought to cry to God in their troubles. Broken verses of a certain psalm came to her, saying God delivered those who cried to him even from things they had brought on themselves, and she had been doing nothing wrong! She tried to trust in him, but could not: he was as far from her as the blue heavens! True, it bent over all, but its one great eye was much too large to see the trouble she was in! What did it matter to the blue sky if she fell down and withered up to bones and dust! She well

might—for here no foot of man might pass till she was a thing terrible to look at! If there was nobody where seemed to be nothing, how fearfully empty was the universe! Ah, if she had God for her friend! What if he was her friend, and she had not known it because she never spoke to him, never asked him to do anything for her? It was horrible to think it *could* be a mere chance whether she got home, or died there! She would pray to God! She would ask him to take her home!

A wintery blast came from the north. The black cloud had risen, and was now spreading over the zenith. Again the wind came with an angry burst and snarl. Snow came swept upon it in hard sharp little pellets. She started up, and forgot to pray.

Some sound in the wind or some hidden motion of memory all at once let loose upon her another fear, which straight was agony. A rumour had reached the New House the night before, that a leopard had broken

from a caravan, and got away to the hills. It was but a rumour; some did not believe it, and the owners contradicted it, but a party had set out with guns and dogs. It was true! it was true! There was the terrible creature crouching behind that stone! He was in every clump of heather she passed, swinging his tail, and ready to spring upon her! He must be hungry by this time, and there was nothing there for him to eat but her! By and by, however, she was too cold to be afraid, too cold to think, and presently, half-frozen and faint for lack of food, was scarce able to go a step farther. She saw a great rock, sank down in the shelter of it, and in a minute was asleep.

She slept for some time, and woke a little refreshed. The wonder is that she woke at all. It was dark, and her first consciousness was ghastly fear. The wind had ceased, and the storm was over. Little snow had fallen. The stars were all out overhead, and the great night was round her, enclosing, watching her. She tried to

rise, and could just move her limbs. Had she fallen asleep again, she would not have lived through the night. But it is idle to talk of what would have been; nothing could have been but what was. Mercy wondered afterwards that she did not lose her reason. She must, she thought, have been trusting somehow in God.

It was terribly dreary. Sure never one sorer needed God's help! And what better reason could there be for helping her than that she so sorely needed it! Perhaps God had let her walk into this trouble that she might learn she could not do without him! She *would* try to be good! How terrible was the world, with such wide spaces and nobody in them!

And all the time, though she did not know it, she was sobbing and weeping.

The black silence was torn asunder by the report of a gun. She started up with a strange mingling of hope and terror, gave a loud cry, and sank senseless. The leopard would be upon her!

Her cry was her deliverance.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE TOMB.

The brothers had that same morning paid their visit to the tomb, and there spent the day after their usual fashion, intending to go home the same night, and as the old moon was very late in rising, to take the earlier and rougher part of the way in the twilight. Just as they were setting out, however, what they rightly judged a passing storm came on, and they delayed their departure. By the time the storm was over, it was dark, and there was no use in hurrying; they might as well stop a while, and have the moon the latter part of the way. When at length they were again on the point of starting, they thought they heard

something like sounds of distress, but the darkness making search difficult and unsatisfactory, the chief thought of firing his gun, when Mercy's cry guided them to where she lay. Alister's heart, at sight of her, and at the thought of what she must have gone through, nearly stood still. They carried her in, laid her on the bed, and did what they could to restore her, till she began to come to herself. Then they left her, that she might not see them without preparation, and sat down by the fire in the outer room, leaving the door open between the two.

"I see how it is!" said Alister. "You remember, Ian, what you said to her about giving Nature an opportunity of exerting her influence? Mercy has been following your advice, and has lost her way among the hills!"

"That was so long ago!" returned Ian thoughtfully.

"Yes—when the weather was not fit for it. It is not fit now, but she has ventured!"

"I believe you are right! I thought there was some reality in her!—But she must not hear us talking about her!"

When Mercy came to herself, she thought at first that she lay where she had fallen, but presently perceived that she was covered, and had something hot at her feet: was she in her own bed? was it all a terrible dream, that she might know what it was to be lost, and think of God? She put out her arm: her hand went against cold stone. The dread thought rushed in—that she was buried—was lying in her grave—to lie there till the trumpet should sound, and the dead be raised. She was not horrified; her first feeling was gladness that she had prayed before she died. She had been taught at church that an hour might come when it would be of no use to pray—the hour of an unbelieving death: it was of no use to pray now, but her prayer before she died might be of some avail! She wondered that she was not more frightened, for in sooth it was a dreary

prospect before her: long and countless years must pass ere again she heard the sound of voices, again saw the light of the sun! She was half awake and half dreaming; the faintness of her swoon yet upon her, the repose following her great weariness, and the lightness of her brain from want of food, made her indifferent—almost happy. She could lie so a long time, she thought.

At length she began to hear sounds, and they were of human voices. She had companions then in the grave! she was not doomed to a solitary waiting for judgment! She must be in some family-vault, among strangers. She hoped they were nice people: it was very desirable to be buried with nice people!

Then she saw a reddish light. It was a fire—far off! Was she in the bad place? Were those shapes two demons, waiting till she had got over her dying? She listened: —"That will divide her between us," said one. "Yes," answered the other; "there

will be no occasion to cut it!" What dreadful thing could they mean? But surely she had heard their voices before! She tried to speak, but could not.

"We must come again soon!" said one. "At this rate it will take a life-time to carve the tomb."

"If we were but at the roof of it!" said the other. "I long to tackle the great serpent of eternity, and lay him twining and coiling and undulating all over it! I dream about those tombs before ever they were broken into—royally furnished in the dark, waiting for the souls to come back to their old, brown, dried up bodies!"

Here one of them rose and came toward her, growing bigger and blacker as he came, until he stood by the bedside. He laid his hand on her wrist, and felt her pulse. It was Ian! She could not see his face for there was no light on it, but she knew his shape, his movements! She was saved!

He saw her wide eyes, two great spiritual nights, gazing up at him.

"Ah, you are better, Miss Mercy!" he said cheerily. "Now you shall have some tea!"

Something inside her was weeping for joy, but her outer self was quite still. She tried again to speak, and uttered a few inarticulate sounds. Then came Alister on tiptoe, and they stood both by the bedside, looking down on her.

"I shall be all right presently!" she managed at length to say. "I am so glad I'm not dead! I thought I was dead!"

"You would soon have been if we had not found you!" replied Alister.

"Was it you that fired the gun?"

"Yes."

"I was so frightened!"

"It saved your life, thank God! for then you cried out."

"Fright was your door out of fear!" said Ian.

"I thought it was the leopard!"

"I did bring my gun because of the leopard," said Alister.

"It was true about him then?"

"He is out."

"And now it is quite dark!"

"It doesn't signify; we'll take a lantern; I've got my gun, and Ian has his dirk!"

"Where are you going then?" asked Mercy, still confused.

"Home, of course."

"Oh, yes, of course! I will get up in a minute."

"There is plenty of time," said Ian. "You must eat something before you get up. We have nothing but oat-cakes, I am sorry to say!"

"I think you promised me some tea!" said Mercy. "I don't feel hungry."

"You shall have the tea. When did you eat last?"

"Not since breakfast."

"It is a marvel you are able to speak! You must try to eat some oat-cake."

"I wish I hadn't taken that last slice of deer-ham!" said Alister, ruefully.

"I will eat if I can," said Mercy.

They brought her a cup of tea and some pieces of oat-cake; then, having lighted her a candle, they left her, and closed the door.

She sipped her tea, managed to eat a little of the dry but wholesome food, and found herself capable of getting up. It was the strangest bedroom! she thought. Everything was cut out of the live rock. The dressing-table might have been a sarcophagus! She kneeled by the bedside, and tried to thank God. Then she opened the door. The chief rose at the sound of it.

"I'm sorry," he said, "that we have no woman to wait on you."

"I want nothing, thank you!" answered Mercy, feeling very weak and ready to cry, but restraining her tears. "What a curious house this is!"

"It is a sort of doll's house my brother and I have been at work upon for nearly fifteen years. We meant, when summer was come, to ask you all to spend a day with us up here."

"When first we went to work on it," said

Ian, "we used to tell each other tales in which it bore a large share, and Alister's were generally about a lost princess taking refuge in it!"

"And now it is come true!" said Alister.

"What an escape I have had!"

"I do not like to hear you say that!" returned Ian. "You have been taken care of all the time. If you had died in the cold, it would not have been because God had forgotten you; you would not have been lost."

"I wanted to know," said Mercy, "whether Nature would speak to me. It was of no use! She never came near me!"

"I think she must have come without your knowing her," answered Ian. "But we shall have a talk about that afterwards, when you are quite rested; we must prepare for home now."

Mercy's heart sank within her—she felt so weak and sleepy! How was she to go back over all that rough mountain-way! But she dared not ask to be left—with the

leopard about! He might come down the wide chimney!

She soon found that the brothers had never thought of her walking. They wrapt her in Ian's plaid. Then they took the chief's, which was very strong, and having folded it twice lengthwise, drew each an end of it over his shoulders, letting it hang in a loop between them: in this loop they made her seat herself, and putting each an arm behind her, tried how they could all get on. After a few shiftings and accommodations, they found the plan likely to answer. So they locked the door, and left the fire glowing on the solitary hearth.

To Mercy it was the strangest journey—an experience never to be forgotten. The tea had warmed her, and the air revived her. It was not very cold, for only now and then blew a little puff of wind. The stars were brilliant overhead, and the wide void of the air between her and the earth below seemed full of wonder and mystery. Now and then she fancied some distant

sound the cry of the leopard: he might be coming nearer and nearer as they went! but it rather added to the eerie witchery of the night, making it like a terrible story read in the deserted nursery, with the distant noise outside of her brothers and sisters at play. The motion of her progress by and by became pleasant to her. Sometimes her feet would brush the tops of the heather; but when they came to rocky ground, they always shortened the loop of the plaid. To Mercy's inner ear came the sound of words she had heard at church: "He shall give his angels charge over thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Were not these two men God's own angels!

They scarcely spoke, except when they stopped to take breath, but went on and on with a steady, rhythmic, silent trudge. Up and down the rough hill, and upon the hardly less rough hill-road, they had enough ado to heed their steps. Now and then

they would let her walk a little way, but not far. She was neither so strong nor so heavy as a fat deer, they said.

They were yet high among the hills, when the pale, withered, waste shred of the old moon rose above the upheaved boat-like back of one of the battlements of the horizon-rampart. With disconsolate face, now lost, now found again, always reappearing where Mercy had not been looking for her, she accompanied them the rest of their journey, and the witch-like creature brought out the whole character of the night. Rocked in her wonderful swing, Mercy was not always quite sure that she was not dreaming the strangest, pleasantest dream. Were they not fittest for a dream, this star and moon beset night—this wind that now and then blew so eerie and wild, yet did not wake her—this gulf around, above, and beneath her, through which she was borne as if she had indeed died, and angels were carrying her through wastes of air to some unknown region afar? Ex-

cept when she brushed the heather, she forgot that the earth was near her. The arms around her were the arms of men and not angels, but how far above this lower world dwelt the souls that moved those strong limbs! What a small creature she was beside them! how unworthy of the labour of their deliverance! Her awe of the one kept growing; the other she could trust with heart as well as brain; she could never be afraid of him! To the chief she turned to shadow her from Ian.

When they came to the foot of the path leading up to Mistress Conal's cottage, there, although it was dark night, sat the old woman on a stone.

"It's a sorrow you are carrying home with you, chief!" she said in Gaelic. "As well have saved a drowning man!"

She did not rise or move, but spoke like one talking by the fireside.

"The drowning man has to be saved, mother!" answered the chief, also in Gaelic; "and the sorrow in your way has

to be taken with you. It won't let you pass!"

"True, my son!" said the woman; "but it makes the heart sore that sees it!"

"Thank you for the warning then, but welcome the sorrow!" he returned. "Good night."

"Good night, chief's sons both!" she replied. "You're your father's anyway! Did he not one night bring home a frozen fox in his arms, to warm him by his fire! But when he had warmed him—*he turned him out!*"

It was quite clear when last they looked at the sky, but the moment they left her, it began to rain heavily.

So fast did it rain, that the men, fearing for Mercy, turned off the road, and went down a steep descent, to make straight across their own fields for the cottage; and just as they reached the bottom of the descent, although they had come all the rough way hitherto without slipping or stumbling once, the chief fell. He rose in consterna-

tion; but finding that Mercy, upheld by Ian, had simply dropped on her feet, and taken no hurt, relieved himself by unsparing abuse of his clumsiness. Mercy laughed merrily, resumed her place in the plaid, and closed her eyes. She never saw where they were going, for she opened them again only when they stopped a little as they turned into the fir-clump before the door.

"Where are we?" she asked; but for answer they carried her straight into the house.

"We have brought you to our mother instead of yours," said Alister. "To get wet would have been the last straw on the back of such a day. We will let them know at once that you are safe."

Lady Macruadh, as the highlanders generally called her, made haste to receive the poor girl with that sympathetic pity which, of all good plants, flourishes most in the Celtic heart. Mercy's mother had come to her in consternation at her absence, and

the only comfort she could give her was the suggestion that she had fallen in with her sons. She gave her a warm bath, put her to bed, and then made her eat, so preparing her for a healthful sleep. And she did sleep, but dreamed of darkness and snow and leopards.

As men were out searching in all directions, Alister, while Ian went to the New House, lighted a beacon on the top of the old castle to bring them back. By the time Ian had persuaded Mrs. Palmer to leave Mercy in his mother's care for the night, it was blazing beautifully.

In the morning it was found that Mercy had a bad cold, and could not be moved. But the cottage, small as it was, had more than one guest-chamber, and Mrs. Macruadh was delighted to have her to nurse.

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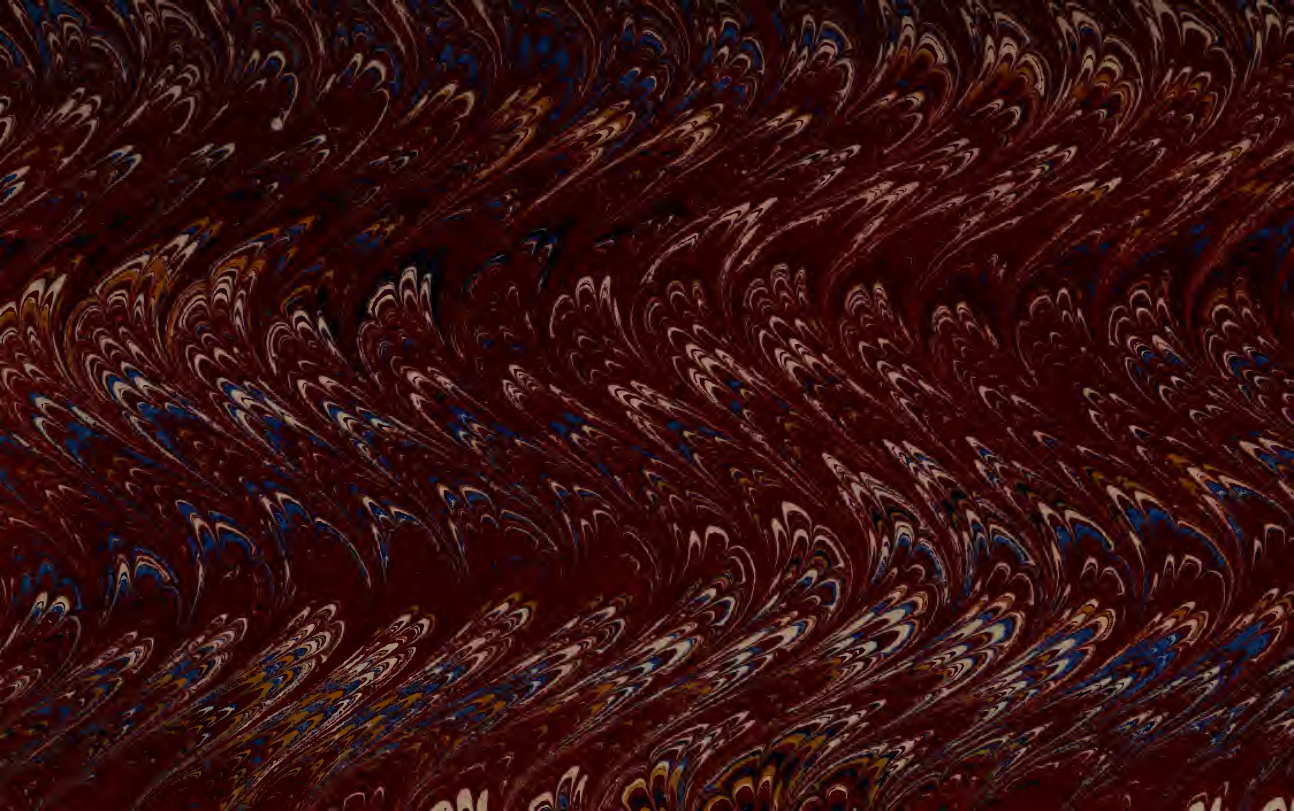

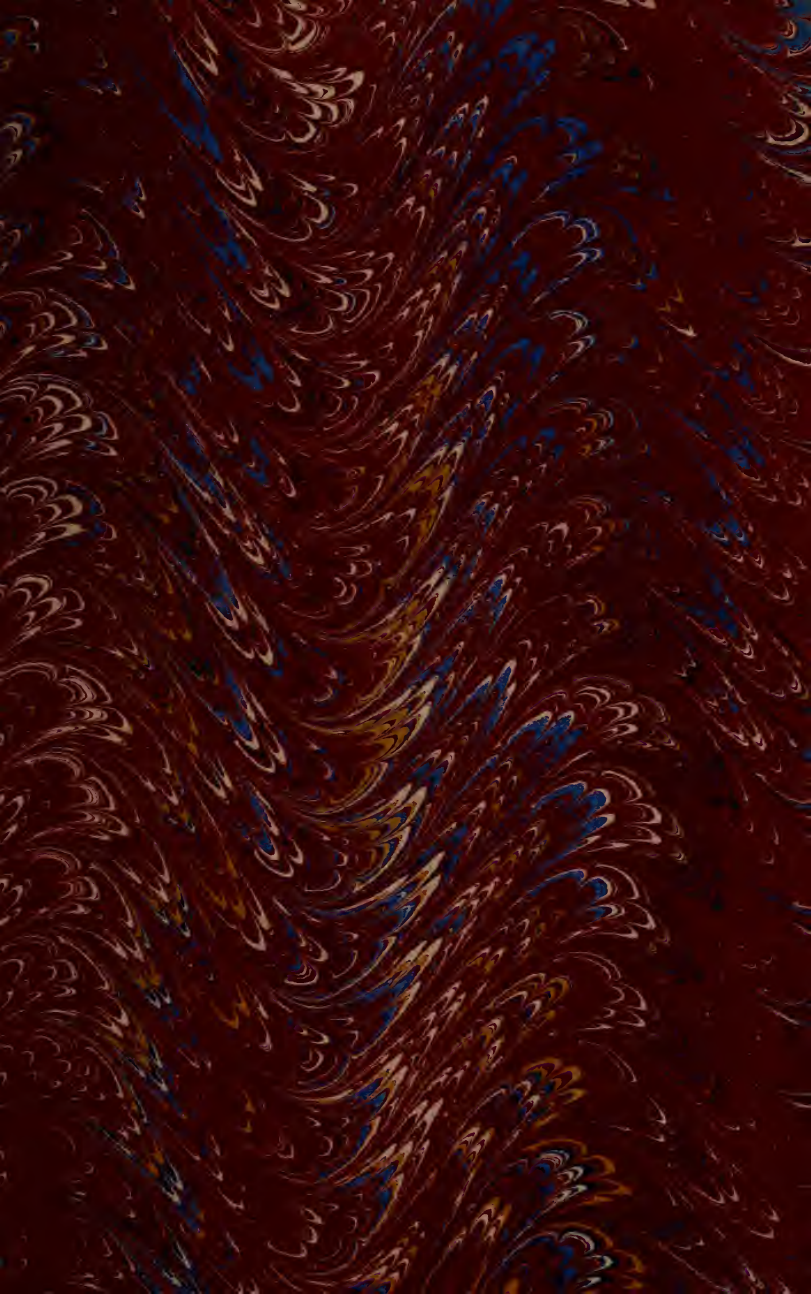

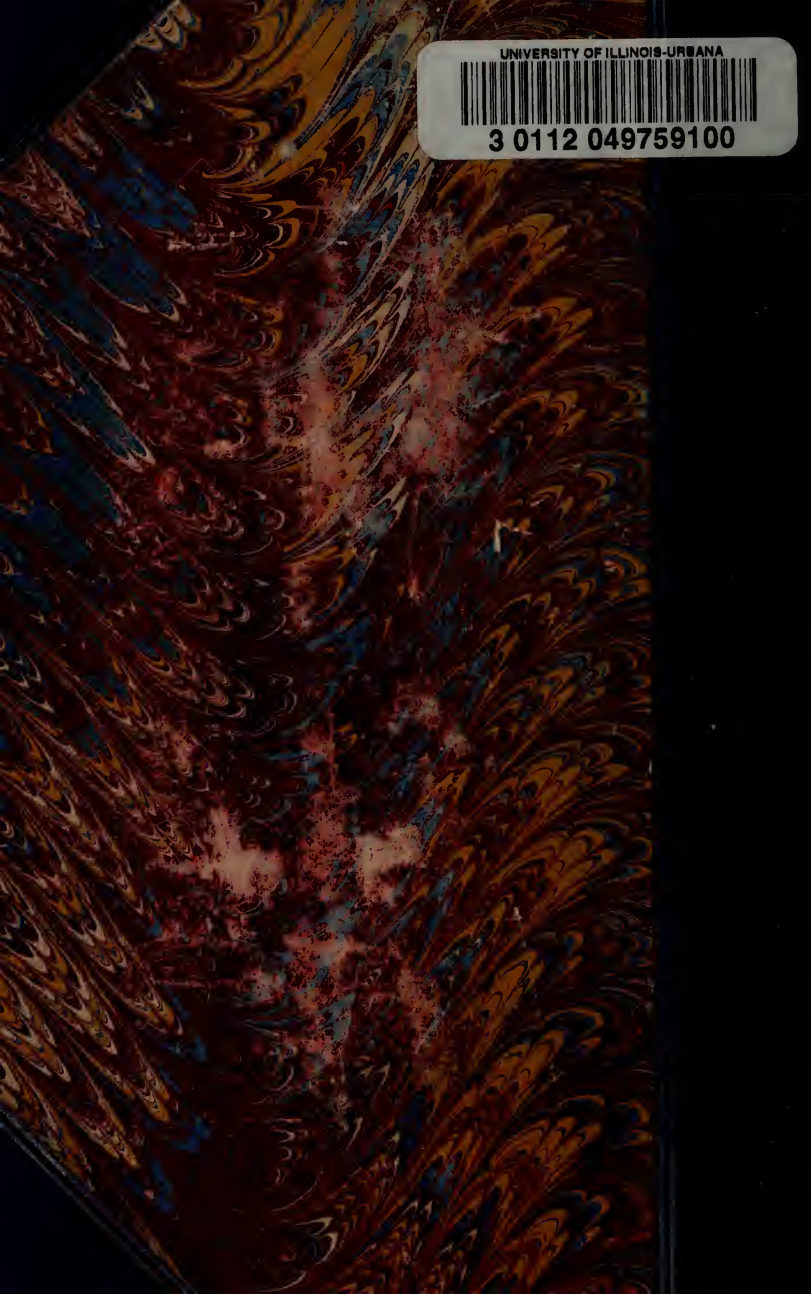
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